Don't Look Back
We love this new spine-chilling RPG. Find out out why inside...

FANTASY SCI-FI HORROR

Netrunner Preview
Cyberpunk meets *Magic* in WOTC's new card game

arcane

the roleplaying magazine

War baby
Introduce the ultimate conflict to your campaign

Roru Prayingu
What the hell is going on with Japanese roleplaying?

Woo - Woo
The golden age of steam explored in our mysterious 12 page encounter

Heresy
This year's most gorgeous card game gets the full arcane treatment

VAMPIRE: THE DARK AGES
Read our full and frank review of White Wolf's most fantastic roleplaying game yet

Reviewed this issue • Vampire: TDA • Don't Look Back • Heresy • Mage • California Free State • Star Wars • Lost Worlds • Sandmen • Red Talons • Mind Lords of the Last Sea • Nobles: The Shining Host • Giant Psychic Insects • Warlock of Stonecrowns • And many more...

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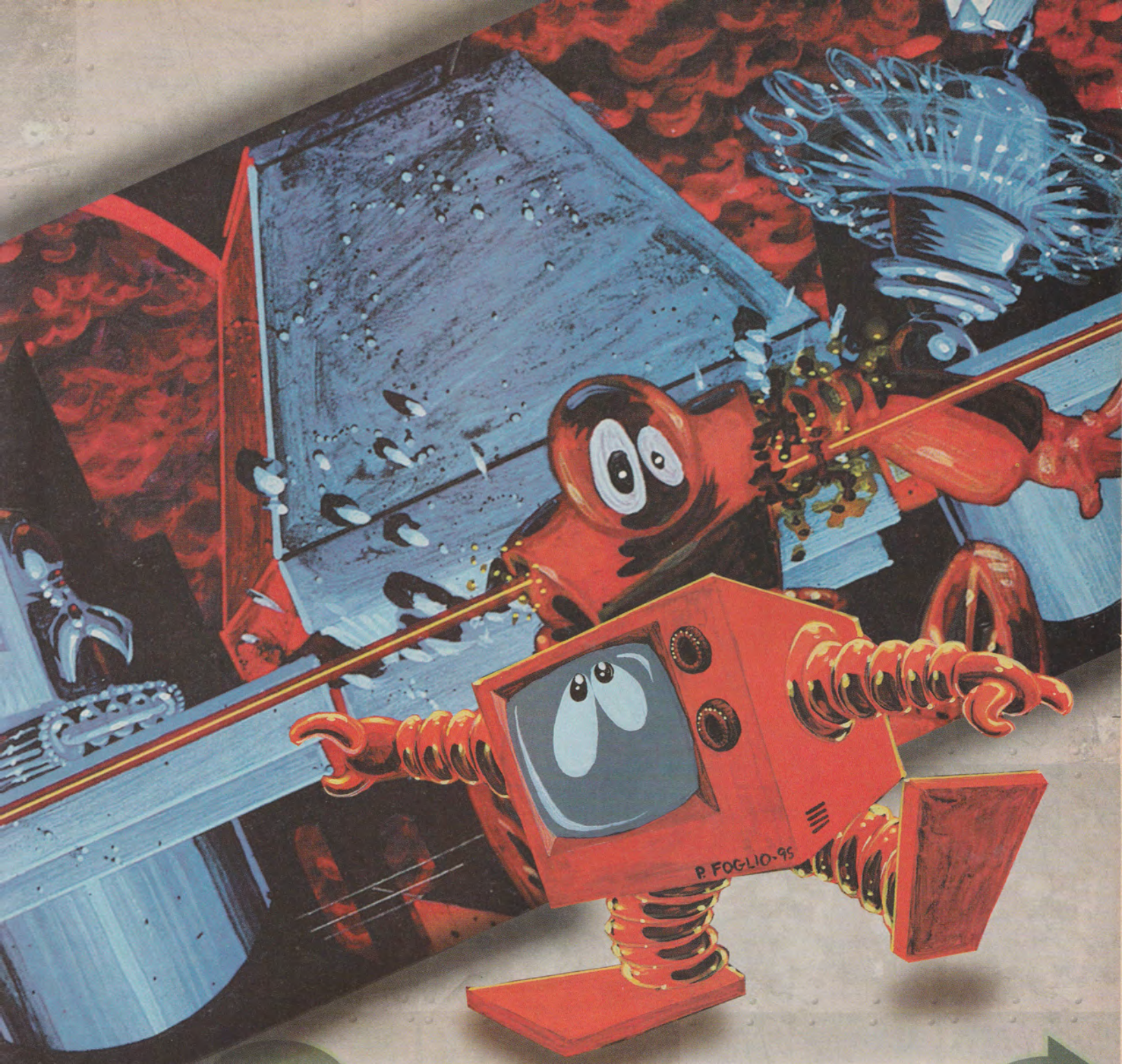

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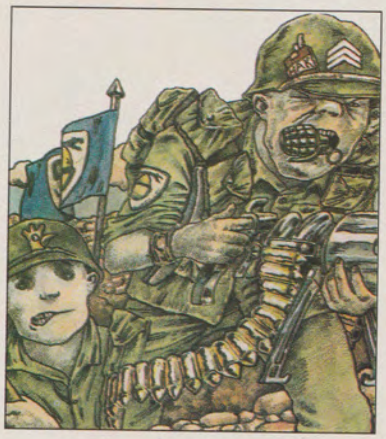
Vampire: The Dark Ages takes those tortured souls we love so well back into the past.

Vampire: TDA review on page 56



War is not a good thing, except as a narrative force.

War Baby on page 22

The Japanese aren't weird, they're just different – take a look for yourself

Roru Prayingu on page 28

What kind of gaming snacks does the arcane team recommend?

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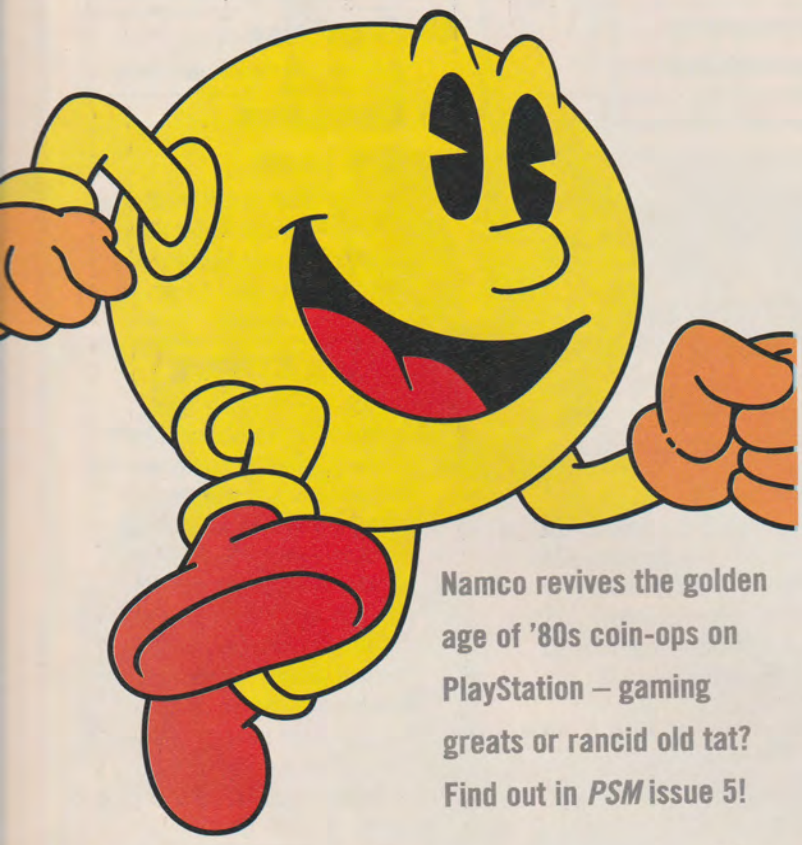

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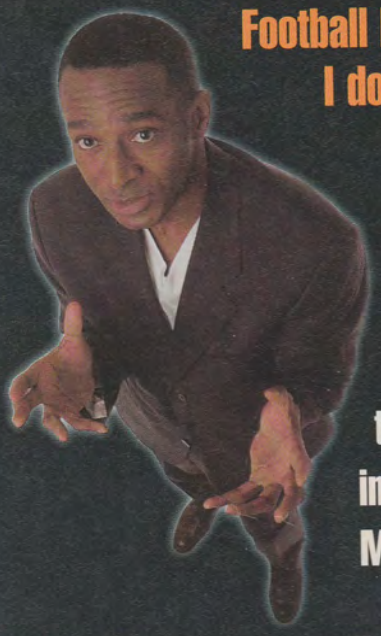
Inside The New Issue Of...

Comedy Review

"I probably care more about what's going on in the third division of the Bolivian Football League than I do about the Perrier Award..."



...says Felix Dexter, the funny one in The Real McCoy.

Tired And Hazy Guy
Steve Martin on Sergeant Bilko, and why he's spurning cinema for the stage

Stumped Again!
Nick Hancock, Lee Hurst and Rory McGrath on the return of They Think It's All Over...

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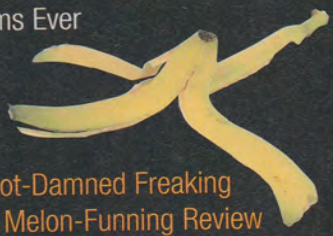

And The Whole Hot-Damned Freaking Comedy Month In Melon-Funning Review

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This issue would have been impossible without...
Oh, hang it. It WAS impossible.
This issue would have been a lot easier without... **Voicemail.**

UP FRONT

There are almost too many good games coming out every month for us to know what to do with them all. I mean, just check out this month's fantastic menu of delights. First up there's *Vampire: The Dark Ages* which graces our cover. It's mostly magnificent and Andy was lucky that he didn't get run over on his way to work each morning as he zig-zagged blindly through Bath's busy early morning traffic with his nose firmly buried in the book. That was after we managed to tear him away from *California Free State* of course, the new *Shadowrun* supplement which practically had him bouncing through the roof with excitement. "It's the best thing ever," he said. "For *Shadowrun* that is," he added, once we'd reminded him of universal suffrage.

And while I'm normally the taciturn, soulful type and not much given to over-enthusiasm, *Heresy* the card game of celestial apocalypse – no, really – has had me pestering people for a game and cooing quietly over the superb artwork. I love it and I'm proud.

That of course is without mentioning the fabulous *Don't Look Back: Second Edition* that's had Paul Pettengale foaming at the mouth (not with enthusiasm particularly, he was just trying to scare his players – very successfully apparently). Oh and let's not forget *Mage* and *Giant Psychic Insects* and, and ooh, loads of others. If the rest of the mag wasn't so good this month I'd suggest you jumped straight to page 55 and started drooling along with us.

When you write to us, please make sure that you clearly mark the envelope with the department it's destined for. 'arcane scribblings' for the letters pages, 'reader ads' for the, er, reader ads and so on.

On the subject of game reviews, astute readers will notice that we've got our first ever four-page review this month for *Vampire:TDA*. It's come about because we thought that last month we could have given a bit more space to *Middle Earth: The Wizards* because we felt that we had a lot to say about it. Hopefully in the future we'll be bringing you big , in-depth reviews of any interesting new game sytems or settings. Of course, that always depends on space, some months are busier than others for new releases, but we'll do our best.

Aside from that change, you'll notice that a few other things have happened too – we're increasing our coverage of conventions in the news, for example. If

Illustration Simon Gurr

there are other things that you think should or shouldn't be in **arcane**, or that you want to see more or less of, please write in and let me know. We do take notice of what you say.

Talking of taking notice of what you say, and people writing in to **arcane**, I have to say that I was really pleased at the number of top-quality letters we got this month. There were far too many for us to fit them all into **arcane** scribblings (which starts on page 84), but we do read them all – and enjoy them all, even the ones we don't have space to print. Keep them coming in. It let's us know you appreciate what we're doing and it gives us a chance to hear what you're trying to tell us.

Steve Faragher
Editor

DESPATCHES

NETRUNNER

What will be the biggest collectable card game of 1996? Wizards of the Coast think they know the answer...

2020: IT IS A GRIM, forbidding future. Genetically-enhanced street samurai roam the filthy, crumbling cities and global mega-corporations rule the world. In the seedy, neon-lit bars illicit cybertech deals are as common as illicit drug deals. But the commodity that fetches the highest price is information.

There was a time when people thought that the global computer network would bring more information to everyone. Until, that was, the corporations moved in and engineered their data fortresses so that they controlled everything. Now there is only one kind of person that can infiltrate those set-ups and retrieve that elusive data: the netrunner.

That is essentially the background to *Netrunner*, the new collectable card game from Richard Garfield. And it's also the background to *Cyberpunk 2020*, the R Talsorian roleplaying game. And the reason that R Talsorian won't be suing Wizards of the Coast is that it's been a joint venture between the two of them.

Netrunner will be Richard Garfield's third CCG. He is of course the inventor of *Magic: The Gathering* and *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle.*

So the last time we met him, we took the opportunity to ask Richard Garfield all about *Netrunner.*

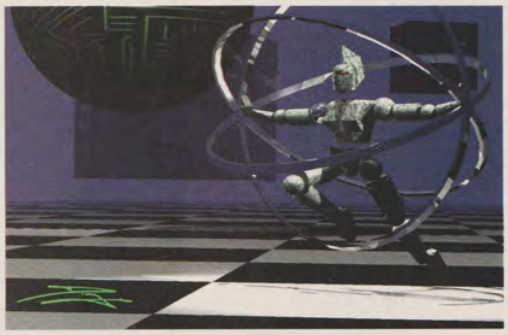
So how does the game work?

"The game is strictly two-person. One player plays the Corporation and they have an Agenda which they want to advance. That Agenda could be something nefarious like political assassination, developing killer weapons, overthrowing societies, things like that, or it could be something more benign: building a marine arcology or advancing your employee's benefits. You'll develop several Agendas over the course of a game. The other player plays the hacker, the Netrunner, and their object is to stop the Corporation from accomplishing their Agenda. They do this by breaking into the computer systems, finding out what the Agenda is and then selling it to other companies or revealing it publicly. For both Corporation and Runner there are a variety of motives, some are good, some are evil. I don't like games that are too black-and-white.

"The gameplay is about twenty minutes long, similar to *Magic*; it's got a lot of bluffing and headgames in it, which is partly an evolution of *Vampire: TES* and partly things I've picked up from conventional card games such as Poker. I think some of my recent interest in German boardgames shows through in the play too."

Which is more fun to play, the part of Runner or Corporation?

"There was a worry that people would want to play one side more than the other: that people would want to play the Runner because that's the more romanticised role in SF literature, but most of the people that have played it have enjoyed being the Corporation too. The different roles in the game are *completely* different; there's a totally different play style to the two sides and the Corporation is attractive to play for many of the same reasons that playing referee in an RPG is so much fun: you know what's going on, you establish the plans and the other one, the Runner, is the one that's dodging the traps."



Unsurprisingly, a lot of the card artwork will be computer generated.

One of the cards, Playful AI, features a picture of Richard Garfield.

Is there going to be an option for more than two people to play?

"There may well be in the future; there isn't right now. I think that's probably one of the first expansions we'll work on. Maybe not *the* first, but pretty soon after that."

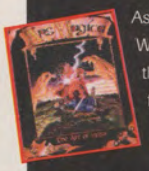
How closely have you worked with R Talsorian on it? How closely does it stick to their *CP2020* universe?

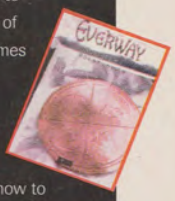
"Well, we've tried to make it so that even though it's got R Talsorian's 'fingerprint' on it, it really is a cyberpunk genre game and won't just appeal to the *CP2020* player."

It sounds irresistible, doesn't it? And judging by reports that have filtered out of the playtesting labs it's going to mark a new departure for CCGs too, having been described as, of all things, more similar to chess than previous CCGs by one insider. An **arcane** review will inevitably follow.

And besides...

HOMES FOUND FOR EVERWAY AND ARS MAGICA





As this issue went to press, Wizards of the Coast announced that it has managed to find homes for two of the roleplaying games it has decided to drop (see **arcane** 3 for the full story). *Everway*, the roleplaying game of spherewalking reviewed in **arcane** 1 (6/10), is now to be published by Pagan Publishing, while *Ars Magica*, the heavily magical dark-ages RPG, will be published by Atlas games.

Pagan publishing have been producing *Call of Cthulhu* supplements for years, as well as publishing *The Unspeakable Oath*, a magazine for *CoC*. Atlas Games are best known for their card game *On the Edge* and their roleplaying game *Over the Edge*. There is still no concrete news about the future of WotC's other major RPG, *SLA Industries*.

COMPANION GAMES FILE FOR BANKRUPTCY

Companion Games, publishers of the *Galactic Empires* SF trading card game, is filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection to restructure its debts. The folks at Companion say they're not going out of business, and that sales in '95 were better than those of '94 and '93. The problem? $60,000 in unpaid debts from an overseas distributor, combined with legal debts run up in a dispute with their first printer, has ruined their cash flow.

KICK OFF

The noble art of pumping long balls into an opponents box has now been immortalised in two brand new CCGs. *Promatch 96* (pictured here) will sell at 80p for eight cards, but unfortunately its gameplay is blatantly stolen from *Top Trumps*. *Squad* from Waddingtons will be slightly more expensive at 99p for nine and will have photographs of your favourite footballers. Although we haven't seen one yet, the *Squad* cards suggest a more promising game with text such as 'Corner at +3' or 'Free Kick at +2'. We can only wait and see.

And besides...

EXPANDING WIZARDS

Wizards of the Coast have announced two new expansions: the intriguingly named *Alliances* for *Magic: The Gathering* (about which there is no information other than the name at the moment) and *Ancient Hearts* for *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle*. *Ancient Hearts* will introduce two new clans to *V:TES*: the Assamite, a non-Camarilla clan based in Turkey, and the Followers of Set, a non-Camarilla clan based primarily in Haiti and Egypt. One seeks to control the Camarilla, the other to destroy it. Gulp. *Ancient Hearts* is due for a summer release.

CTHULHU ON THE CARDS

MYTHOS™

Next month **arcane** hopes to bring you a first look at *Mythos*, the long-awaited collectable card game based on *Call of Cthulhu*. The office is growing hushed with anticipation.

CHANGELING GETS COLLECTABLE

And while we're on the subject of card games, White Wolf have announced that they will be bringing out an entirely new CCG in July. Called *Arcadia: The Wyld Hunt*, it will be based on the *Changeling* RPG and promises to be very different from other card games. But then, they all say that. We'll bring you more details as soon as we have them.

DICEMASTER MESS

It appears we have to apologise for one vital part of our *Dicemaster* preview last issue. The game is being jointly produced by ICE and UK Games Distributors Hobby Games, who will be the sole UK distributors – a fact we neglected to mention. We've spent the intervening month rapping each other severely over the knuckles. It's been quite fun, actually.

Use the force, Luke

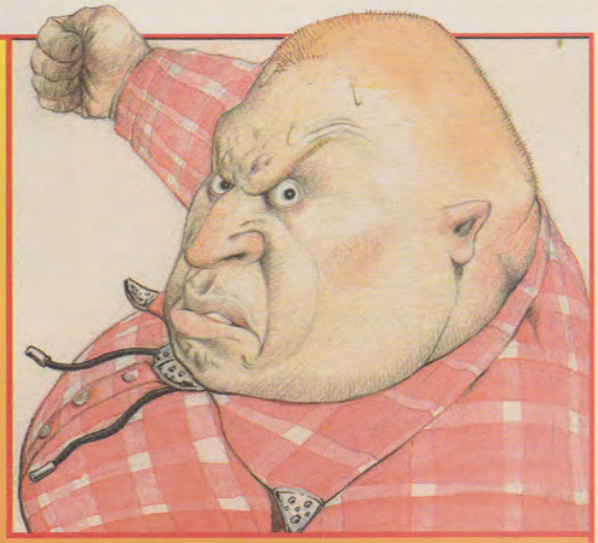
win! arcane COMPETITION in association with CMA

We weren't all that fond of the *Star Wars* CCG, finding it fun in places but overall an average sort of game. You can find out more by turning to our review on page 70.

Despite our reservations, we can't help but notice that it's rather popular with you lot, having made its way rapidly to number 3 in the **arcane**/Esdevium charts. So the kind people at CMA (Creative Marketing Associates, apparently) have offered us the chance to give away a whole box-full of booster packs – that's 36 packs in all – to the first person to be drawn from their enormous hat. Pay attention, though: this is not a competition based at the usual **arcane** address.

You must send a postcard clearly marked with the words 'Star Wars Draw' to: CMA, PO Box 12, Hay-on-Wye, Hereford HR3 5YD. The competition closes on the 30th April 1996.

Will Seymour's misinformed views continue to be given editorial space in this magazine? 'Fraid so...



SEYMOUR J CLANCY III'S GREAT OUTING

It do make mah blurd boyal that mah GREAT OUTING must continue with such unrestrained vigour.

Yet again, I have been informed of the insane irresponsibilitay of those who should be setting an example to our you-eth BUT instead do forget the esteem in which they are held and do delight in dabbling in the degenerate doodah that is commonly known as DOLLY MIXTURES & DIAZEPAM.

For ah have bin reliably informed, by a god-fearing fella from a field in Hampshire who wishes to remain anonymous and shall therefore be known only as 'Teej', that none other than the fantastically famous and forthright four-letter-word-film-mogul Quentin Tarantino is implicated in the demeritous distraction of DEACONS & DANDELIONS. Ah know what this consists of. Ah KNOW what these LUCIFER LOVERS do on a Weddernesday evening when they're not blaspheming and being violent. Indeed, it is common knowledge that the blood of the goat is spilled on the shag-pile carpet of the dahning room wahl the black candles burn, emitting an eeerie laht on a scene of UNSPEAKABLE EVIL. I will not rest until all those who deal in DALEKS & DAIQUIRIS are lashed to the altar and licked mercilessly with the TONGUE OF MAH AWFUL WRATH (*Snip* – Ed).

Seymour will reward Teej with an **arcane** T-shirt as befits his bravery in outing another so-called celebrity. The 'crewsade' continues.

If you are privy to information that could assist Seymour, he would like to hear from you. And he's not above bribery either; after all, the end justifies the means and all that, apparently.

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and... MURDER!

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CARD OF THE MONTH

Vodka Martini

This wonderful card comes from the new *007:Goldeneye* CCG. There are two principal stats in the game and this card adds 2 to Bond's Charisma. The card text reads: "Shaken, not stirred. Attach to any Bond card at any time. A Bond card may have any number of Vodka Martinis attached to it." So let's get this straight, Bond's Charisma goes up by 2 with every Vodka Martini he has and *there's no limit?* 27 big ones later when he's reeling around the bar completely sodden, he has become phenomenally attractive? We think not.

If you'd like to nominate a card for card of the month, write and tell us. It doesn't have to be brand new, just amusing or interesting.

The address is: Card of the Month, **arcane,** 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. Try and enclose the card if you can (we'll send it back to you), or if it's too precious, send us a colour photocopy. And if we like it, we'll send you an **arcane** T-shirt.

Vodka Martini
+2
INTRIGUE
Shaken, not stirred. Attach to any Bond card at any time. A Bond card may have any number of Vodka Martinis attached to it.
LICENCE TO KILL
007

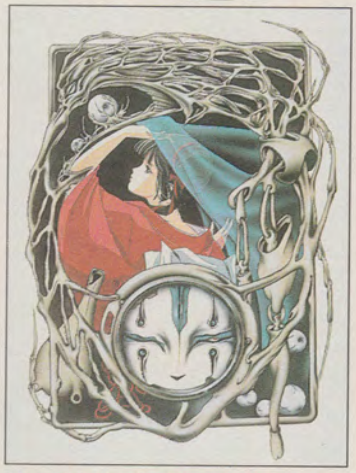
Manga Mia

Win some groovy anime videos and impress your mates with your poly-cultural outlook

win! arcane COMPETITION
In association with Coalition

AS WE'VE GIVEN over quite a bit of this month's magazine to our fascinating roleplaying in Japan feature (which runs from page 28 to page 32) we thought it would be rather splendid if we could get something Japanesey to give away. And as you'll no doubt see when you read it, a lot of the article is given over to discussing Manga, which is not surprising given that it's pretty central to Japanese popular culture. So we phoned up our friends at Coalition who distribute Japanese manga videos in this country, and asked them if they could help us out.

As we were chatting away, we happened to mention that this month we were also having a vampire on our cover. "Well, that's perfect" came an excited cry from the other end of the phone, "We happen to be releasing Vampire Hunter Miyu this month, it's brand new and jolly good, so how about giving some copies of that away?".



Vampire Hunter Miyu. Let's hope she doesn't poke her nose too far into this issue.

When they say 'Giant Robo' they're not kidding are they?

Well that sounded all right by us, but, we asked politely, could we have something that was just a bit more special for the winner? "Oh, okay. How about every video we're releasing this month plus the first episodes of each of those so that they're slightly less confusing?"

And friends, that's just what we've got. The winner of this draw will receive a splendid collection of manga videos comprising: *Vampire Hunter Miyu* (chapters 1&2), *Giant Robo* (chapters 1&2), *Goku Midnight Eye* (chapters 1&2) AND *Mad Bull* (chapters1&2) – eight videos in all. And five lucky runners up will each receive *Vampire Hunter Miyu* (chapters 1&2). Pretty splendid eh?

In order to win yourself this pile of goodies just send us a postcard or an e-mail marked clearly "Blue Magnet Sailor Chimp Yakuza 2026". Post cards should be sent to arcane, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW and e-mails to arcane@futurenet.co.uk.

RULES

1. The closing date is 30th April 1996
2. No employees of Future Publishing or The Coalition Group may enter.
3. Multiple entrants will discover themselves disqualified.
4. The editor's decision is final. No, it is. Because I'm telling you it is, that's why.

RETRO

Starships and Spacemen

Designed by Leonard H Kanterman Fantasy Games Unlimited, $7.00 First published in 1978

In the latest of our blasts from the past, Andrew Rilstone energises his dilithium crystals and gets-starry eyed over one of the first games he ever bought...

S&S supposedly tied in with an earlier, strategic game called *Galactic Conquest*. Earlier than 1978? Perhaps we could persuade *Time Team* to do a programme about it...

A lot of the earliest RPGs had titles like *S&S*. Aside from the obvious *Dungeons & Dragons*, there was also *Tunnels & Trolls*, *Bunnies & Burrows* and *Villains & Vigilantes*. It must have seemed really funny at the time.

The game was written by 'Capt Leonard H Kanterman, MD, US Army Medical Corps', no less.

SINCE THE COVER of *Starships & Spacemen* invited you to 'carry out missions in the Final Frontier', and since the game concerned itself with the crew of a Confederation Starship, it should come as no surprise to discover that it was based quite closely on a certain well-known SF TV show.

Is it any good? To be brutally honest, no: the rules are derivative, the production standards primitive, and the background painfully vague. But still, there is something about it.

Although the rules start off by talking about the various 'branches of the Space Service' that your character might want to join, they rapidly give the game away by revealing that each 'branch' – Military, Technical and Scientific – has a number of, er, sub-classes. That's right: you select your race, you select your class, you amass experience points, you go up levels. Is this sounding at all familiar yet?

Still, this was 1978, and *D&D* was all anyone really knew. The class 'n' level thing suits the *Trek*-inspired universe pretty well, and Dr Kanterman had obviously put some effort into integrating it with the setting. One nice idea is that the different character classes are awarded experience for doing different types of things. People in the military get points for each adversary overcome; scientists get points for making peaceful contact with aliens; commanders get them for actually finishing the mission. What's this? A games mechanic that encourages roleplaying? All the way back in 1978? Surely not!

The character races are also rather well done. Okay, we can spot the fact that the Taurans – think like computers, usually take the job of science officer and only become interested in sex every two years – probably also have pointy ears and silly haircuts. However, they are mirrored by the highly

emotional, triple-gendered, empathic, blue, furry (honest!) Andromedans. Scope for some amusing roleplaying there. You've also got the Rigellians, descendants of a lost human colony, whose job it is to become security guards... and get shot at.

Predictably enough, there are two sets of baddies: the Zangids, who are military fanatics, and the Videni, who are religious fanatics. That they follow a Mahdi makes them sound Islamic, but their ships are shaped like giant Stars of David. The points of the stars are detachable delta-winged kamikaze fighter ships. Do you begin to see why I fell in love with this game? The Zangids have pretended to convert to the Videni religion, and the two are working together to destroy the Human-Tauran-Andromedan Federation – sorry, Confederacy.

This is all good, solid stuff: can't you just imagine the Zangid officer pretending to be very holy whenever his Videni priest is around? Wouldn't you like to roleplay that scene right now? It's pretty sketchy – so far as I can tell, we aren't even told what the Videni look like – but somehow this doesn't seem to hurt. Maybe it even helps: some good ideas in outline form can be more use to a referee than 2,000 pages of brilliant detail he can't remember.

FGU didn't publish a single supplement for *S&S*; only incredibly old people like me remember it; and I'm quite sure that nobody actually plays it any more. But I can't help hoping that someday I'll be exploring an alien planet and stumble through an Alien Artifact into a parallel time-line where *Advanced Starships & Spacemen* is about to go into its third edition. At a time when many people had not worked out that wargames and roleplaying games were two different things, *S&S* offered something calculated to encourage roleplaying in a background that stimulated the referee into having ideas of his own. For that, it deserves some recognition.

Conventions

Conventions are terrific opportunities for you to see and play the latest games, get stuck into tournaments, meet like-minded people and discuss your favourite hobby, eat pretzels, drink beer... in short, they're great fun.

From now on we'll be giving you monthly details of conventions in both the UK and abroad, paying particular each month to one that we reckon is going to be definitely worth a visit. Make a date for one of these happenings in the next four months:

Bug out at the ball

On 27th April from 10am to 11pm

Dudley Bug Ball takes place at the Albright & Wilson Recreation Club, Oldbury. Entry costs £1 (50p to under 16s), and all proceeds will go to local charity Action Heart.

There'll be plenty of trade stands where you can check out and buy the latest games from the likes of TSR, Harlequin, 2nd Games Galour and Spirit Games. For the competitive there's the *AD&D* West Midlands Open Championship, the *Dragon Dice* West Midlands Championship, a *Call of Cthulhu* tournament, an *Elric* tournament, a ten-hour *Civilisation* tournament and a figure painting competition. (The *AD&D* championship is sanction by the RPGA – RolePlaying Game Association – an organisation that supports roleplaying games through the organisation of events and the publication of the *Polyhedron* newsletter.)

Sandwiches will be available throughout the day, and a bar will be open during licensing hours.

Convention diary

30-31st March • CheeseCon • Robert Gordon University Students' Union, Aberdeen • Contact tel: 01224 644230, web: http://www.rgu.ac.uk

(continued over)

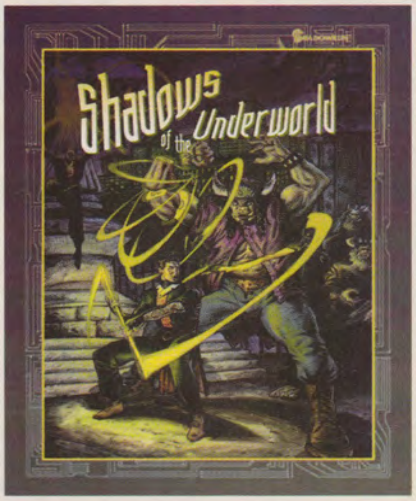
COMING SOON

Shadows of the Underworld

After what seems like a very long wait, FASA have finally announced that *Shadows of the Underworld*, a set of adventures for *Shadowrun*, will be coming out in June. The eagerness with which *Shadowrun* fans have been awaiting this particular expansion may be explained by the fascination we all share for the workings of the criminal mind: *Shadows of the Underworld* exposes the dark and seamy criminal subculture of the Awakened world to the light of day.

Featuring tongs, Mafia, go-gangs and policlubs, this supplement will explain why the criminal underworld of the near future can be just as dangerous as the power of the mega-corps.

The supplement promises plenty of variety. The various underworld elements all have their own methods of conducting their nefarious businesses, from the sophistication of the policlubs to the brutish violence of the savage go-gangs. Sounds like fun.



COMING SOON

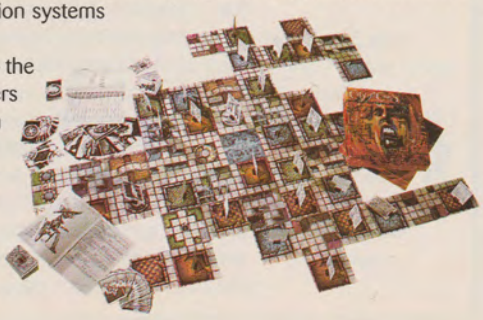
City of Chaos

Turmoil on the streets from Monocle Games

IF YOU FIND EVEN OXFORD STREET at Christmas time a little too... well, pedestrian, then *City of Chaos* may give you that vital injection of entropy that you crave.

City of Chaos is the first offering from Yorkshire-based newcomers Monocle Games. It's a boardgame with a difference: no board. Instead, everything happens on 50 city tiles, augmented by six pewter figurines and a pack of 330 playing cards.

The game is played out in the imaginary city of Byronitar, which is besieged by the forces of Chaos. Between one and six players take the part of adventurers attempting to discover the source of the Chaos, overcome it and re-establish order. Throughout their quest they will meet strange beasts, spirits, and interact with over 100 characters. The game uses random world and plot generation systems to ensure that no two sessions are the same.



Although it should be easy for new players to get into – the rulebook is only 20 pages long – *City of Chaos*, the makers claim, offers enormous depth and atmosphere. An accompanying 180-page book contains nearly 700 paragraphs of explanatory text that are keyed by specific game events. When an event happens, just look it up in the book to find out what it's all about.

City of Chaos will cost £34.99 and is due for release in April. Expect a review soon after. You can get more details from Monocle Games on 01535 607152.

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Wizards OF THE COAST

Conventions

6th April • *Magic* Tournament • Westmoreland Arms, London • Contact Guild of Melee and Magic, tel: 0181 715 8675

12-14th April • **Itinerari Fantastici** • Sports Palace (Ruffini Park), Turin, Italy • Contact Itinerari Fantastici Organizing Committee, c/o Games Centre, Centro Commerciale, La Rinascente, via Lagrange 15 10123 Torino, Italy, email: Ffaenza@mailbox.icom.it

27th April • **Dudley Bug Ball** • Albright & Wilson Recreation Centre, Oldbury • Contact Steve Turner tel: 0121 420 509, email: bonna@dimension.win-uk.net

30th April-5th May • **Zine-Con 96** • Hoechst, Germany • Contact Lukas Kautzsch, tel: +49 721 616815

3-6th May • **Freyrsgildi** • Ripley Castle, N Yorks • Contact 01282 705726

12th May • **Fantasy Fair** • The Cresset Exhibition Centre, Bretton, Peterborough • Contact Bruce King, tel: 01480 216372

18-19th May • **Beer 'n' Pretzels Games Weekend** • Burton-on-Trent • Contact Phil Bootherstone, tel: 01283 511293

25-27th May • Great British Games Festival • Old Ship Hotel, Brighton • Contact SFCP, tel: 0171 358 1613, email: gbgf@sfcp.co.uk

5-7th July • **Ambercon UK** • Hilton National, Croydon • Contact Simone Cooper, 4 The Beeches, 193 Boston Rd, Hanwell, London W7 2JU, email: simone@wyrdrune.demon.co.uk

6-7th July • **Games Workshop 1996 Grand Tournament** (Now sold out) • Leicester University • Contact Games Workshop, tel: 01773 713213

12-14th July • **StabCon 96** • Woolton Hall, Fallowfield, Manchester • Contact Stabcon, 17 Davenport Park Rd, Stockport, Cheshire SK2 6JU

13-14th July • **DrakCon 96** • Northern College of Education, Aberdeen • Contact Sandy Douglas, 5 Cottage Brae, Nellfield Place, Aberdeen, Scotland AB1 6DG

13-14th July • **Battlemasters IV** • The Carlton Suite, Hagley Rd, Birmingham •

COMING SOON

Dr Who and the X-Files

No, it's not a TV programme about FBI agents investigating a mysterious police phone box, but two eagerly awaited and otherwise completely unrelated collectable card games based on science fiction TV programmes that have achieved some measure of popularity.

The *Dr Who* CCG is scheduled for release at the end of April. Limited edition 60-card starter decks will cost £7, while 12-card boosters with additional characters, powers skills and adventures will sell for £3. In all there will be over 300 cards to collect.

The *X-Files* game is being developed by NXT Games and Donruss Trading Cards. *X-Files* creator Chris Carter and his team are working with the designers to ensure that the game retains the feel and flavour of the series. Full-colour stills from the first two seasons of the programme will adorn the cards, which should be available by July. More information on both as soon as it's available.

COMING SOON

Space Hulk 2 and Codex Chaos

Games Workshop pump out some more goodies

SPACE HULK, THE GAME of pest-control in the 41st millennium, is preparing for dust off on 1st April. This, the second edition of the popular boardgame, is an update of the original rather than a complete rewrite. Packaged as a boxed set and priced around the £40 mark, *Space Hulk 2* contains a rulebook, mission book, new artwork on the cardboard sections representing the Hulk, 20 Genestealers and 10 re-modelled plastic Terminators (which look spot on). The gameplay has undergone minor surgery but remains essentially the same, while the 18 missions provided are a mixture of the originals and some entirely new ones. *Space Hulk II* is designed to stand alone, and no supplements are currently planned. Look out for a full review in the next issue of **arcane**.

Though still under-development, *Codex Chaos* for *Warhammer 40,000* looks set to add a terrifying new twist to the forces of corruption. The book will contain details of all nine of the original Traitor Legions and their allegiances to the Chaos Powers, plus Chapters that have rebelled since the Heresy and follow no particular god.

The Traitor Marines are living fossils, throwbacks to the Horus Heresy, and so are still armed much as the marines were 10,000 years ago. Their advanced weaponry is often experimental: unstable plasma guns that are more potent than modern equivalents but likely to explode in the wielder's face. Some carry missing-link weapons such as the rapid-firing, linked autocannon – the forerunner of the assault cannon.

The *Codex* demonstrates that chaos can be a fickle master, and some elements of the army are endemically unpredictable. For example, Chaos Dreadnoughts suffer from psychological torments that can drive them rampaging through their own troops, while Daemons must now be summoned, with the chance of success depending on the Chaos army's ability to create battlefield conditions conducive to each Powers' creatures. The greater the psychic activity generated, for instance, the greater the likelihood of Tzeentchian Daemons being attracted to the battle.

Chaos is also apt to spawn some rather odious individuals, so characters are well catered for by the book. So far details have emerged concerning Abaddon, Horus' righthand man, who fastidiously sports Horus' right lightning claw, and Kharn the Betrayer: a Khornate champion who could eat a Hive Tyrant for lunch. Kharn's speciality is to berserk charge round the battlefield at triple rate and pound opponents with his weapon skill of 9 while contemptuously ignoring parry attempts. Oh dear.

By the way, Games Workshop have asked us to point out that while they're always happy to receive contributions from players, they've got enough ideas now for the *Squat Codex*. Thank you very much.

GO WILD IN THE COUNTRY

As if it wasn't enough that hordes of peculiar people dress up in character every year, now somebody's gone and made a video of them doing it...

A scene of epic combat unfolds as two mighty titans clash. In a field somewhere. But seriously kids – don't try this at home. Oh hang on, that's the point isn't it...

THIS COUNTRY'S BIGGEST annual Live Roleplaying event is The Gathering, where something in excess of two thousand people gather (surprisingly) every year over the August Bank Holiday weekend to take part in a massive festival of fighting, magic and political intrigue.

Dungeons & Flagons (*Ouch* – Ed) is a video documentary based on last year's event. Anybody interested in LARP who has yet to try it will find that it gives them a pretty good overview of what's involved. The video features lots of dramatic footage from the event itself, interviews with participants and some behind-the-scenes investigation.

Dungeons & Flagons lasts for roughly an hour-and-a-half, and is available from selected retail outlets (it says here). If your selected retail outlet doesn't have it then you can always try the makers: Abertawe Video Arts, 5 George Street, The Sandfields, Swansea SA1 4HH. Tel: 01792 459978.

Famous for 15 Minutes

While we accept that the Simpsons are the number-one geek icons of our generation, it is pleasing to see roleplaying featured in such a popular TV show. Tony Blews of Stafford and Heather White of Tulane University have brought our attention to two separate episodes that refer to the hobby. Heather recalls *Homer goes to College*, in which Homer tells Bart he'd played *D&D* and Bart warns him he's becoming a nerd. She sees this as better than being called a

child-molesting satanic cult leader, but doesn't like the trend.

Tony refers to *Treehouse of Horror VI: A Nightmare on Evergreen Terrace*, where class dork Martin Prince goes into a daydream and becomes 'the wizard of mathematics' with maximum charisma and a million hit points. Ah, the sunny reveries of youth. Both Simpsons fans will receive an **arcané** T-shirt, an item that is fast becoming a *de rigeur* accessory throughout the fashion world.

If you'd like to be seen wearing one, tell us where you've noticed roleplaying surface in the mass media.

Write in to us at

15 Minutes, arcane,
30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW

or email *arcane@futurenet.co.uk*

and we'll make you the envy of all you meet.

COMING SOON

Alien Breed 3D2

Just another shoot-'em-up, or a significant step forward for the CRPG?

The parallel between first person perspective shoot-'em-ups and roleplaying systems is an easy one to see. The scenario you're placed in with *Doom*, for example, is none other than a dungeon bash-'em up where you have to collect keys, weapons, medi-kits (healing potions), map an area, discover secret rooms, waste monsters and make your way to the next level.

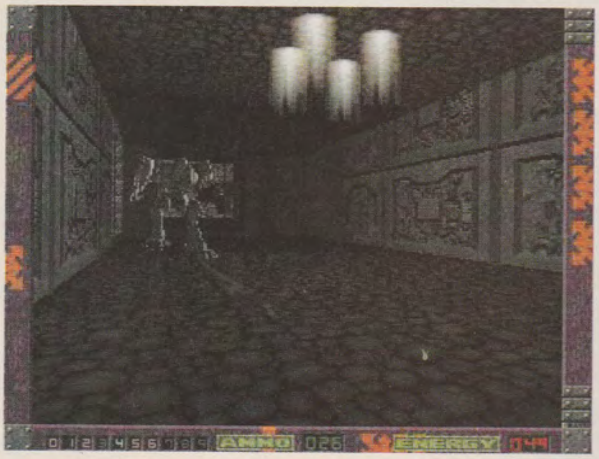
Despite the simplicity of the scenarios involved, *Doom* was probably responsible for selling an obscene amount of expensive PCs. Meanwhile, just like *Dungeons and Dragons* in the '70s, the game has spawned hundreds of wannabe systems and imitators.

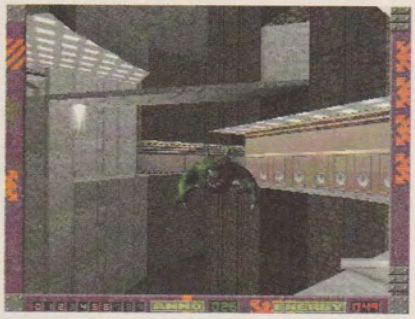
The cheaper and more elegant Amiga computer hasn't been immune from this phenomenon. Now and only now, are the technical mechanics of the game such as running speed and graphic detail starting to be incidental to the plot.

Team 17's *Alien Breed 2 – The Killing Grounds* promises to herald a breakthrough in the way *Doom* clones will be perceived in the future. Aside from offering 16 levels featuring complex puzzles and missions, the game also includes a level editor which allows the player to exercise complete control over his own creations.

Using the level editor, each object (such as walls, doors, switches, lights etc) can be given a value which it can withstand before being broken. Not just that, but each creature can have one of four distinct behaviour patterns attached to them. And within each behaviour pattern there are several parameters that can be adjusted – making each creature an individual in its own right. Judicious use of these tools could allow you to create, well, your own simple scenarios.

Will he be aggressive or defensive? Will he stay in that corner or come looking for you? Well, you'll be able to decide.





How does this fella fly then? It just ain't natural I tell you.

The overall scope and potential for fun is staggering. Once again the debate will rage about whether creating a good scenario is better than playing in it. Either way, everyone will be a winner.

Alien Breed 3D is scheduled to be released on the Amiga soon. If you're keen to take a look and you feel like you can't wait for the game to come out, our sister magazine Amiga Format will have a demo on the cover of their May issue. Aren't they kind?

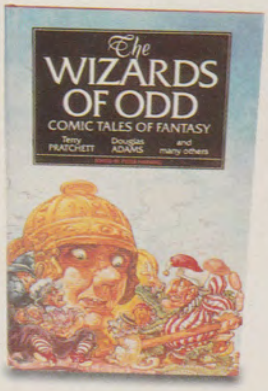
It's enough to give you nightmares, isn't it?

Funny Peculiar

To celebrate this month's release of the stunningly excellent *Wizards of Odd* (see The Great Library, page 80), Souvenir Press have rummaged through their offices to find six hardback copies to give away as competition prizes. They tell us the book has almost sold out already, so to reserve your free copy, write to us at: 'Why do authors always have a spare initial in their names?' competition, **arcane** 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW with the answer to this question:

'What is Arthur C Clarke's middle name?'

The closing date for this competition is not until 31st May 1996 in effort to appease some of our vociferous Australian readers.



Pay the following heed:

1. One entry good, two entries bad.
2. Souvenir and Future folk can't play.
3. The editor's decisions are written in stone and carried down mountain sides on the backs of his complaining staff.

win! arcane COMPETITION
in association with Souvenir Press

CHARTS

Making a welcome return this month is the **arcane**/Esdevium chart. These are Esdevium's best-selling games in February. Esdevium Games is one of the largest games shops in the country and has an extensive mail order service too, as well as being a wholesale distributor. Esdevium games can be contacted at 1 Pickford Street, Aldershot, Hampshire, or on 01252 26116.

RPG BOARDGAMES

1	*Vampire: The Dark Ages* (White Wolf)	£16.99
2	*Roborally* (Wizards of the Coast)	£29.99
3	*Roborally: Armed and Dangerous* (Wizards of the Coast)	£22.50
4	*Technocracy: Void Engineers – Mage* (White Wolf)	£5.99
5	*Battletech Record Sheets 3055/58* (FASA)	£10.99
6	*Mort Sourcebook – SLA Industries* (Wizards of the Coast)	£14.99
7	*Nobles: Shining Host – Changeling* (White Wolf)	£6.99
8	*More Excuses to Kill Things – Macho Women with Guns* (BTRC)	£6.95
9	*London's Burning;* wargame of the Battle of Britain (Avalon Hill)	£29.95
10	*Awakenings – New Magic in 2057 – Shadowrun* (FASA)	£12.99

COLLECTABLE CARD GAMES

1. Magic: The Gathering (Wizards of the Coast)
2. Ice Age (Wizards of the Coast)
3. Star Wars (Decipher)
4. Sim City (Mayfair)
5. Star Trek (Decipher)
6. Dragon Dice (TSR)
7. Vampire: The Eternal Struggle (Wizards of the Coast)
8. Fantasy Adventures (Mayfair)
9. Overpower (Fleer)
10. Guardians (FPG)

next month in arcane

We are his spawn. Apparently. Roleplaying games have corrupted our immortal souls to the extent that we shall never rise to the Kingdom of Heaven (not even if we roll three criticals on the trot). arcane investigates fundamentalism and asks the question:
What the hell are bible-bashers on about?

D.I.Y

Design your own roleplaying game with the first installment of our three-part feature.

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COLUMN

A Short and Biased History of Roleplaying

There was a time when roleplaying games were about unruly mobs of adventurers mugging innocent dragons for treasure. Not any more. Here are five epoch-making games that changed roleplaying forever.

Andrew Rilstone

Andrew is the editor of *Interactive Fantasy*, the journal of roleplaying and story-making systems, and is also a regular contributor to arcane.

We lost our virginity with *Call of Cthulhu*. It taught us that PCs didn't have to be warriors and that dying wasn't necessarily the same thing as losing. It didn't take us long to discover that the average Aberrant Abomination wouldn't bat an eyelid when we shot it with a machine gun. Even if it had had any eyes. We had to use brains rather than brawn – and investigation turned out to be just as much fun as mayhem. We used to think that a great victory meant bumping off Beelzebub and getting the experience points to advance to 200th level. We realised that it could be just as much of a triumph to discover a tiny fragment of the truth about He Who Cannot Be Spelled Correctly.

Having faced Cthulhu, there is nothing to do but go insane: so that was what we did. *Toon*, Steve Jackson's game of cartoon roleplaying, with it's studied stupidity and gung-ho attitude to rules, changed the way we thought about roleplaying. Up until then players expected a 'scenario' to present them with a challenging task; it should have a list of monsters and NPCs, a storyline that was as labyrinthine as the floorplans. *Toon* chucked this idea out of the window. *Toon* was most fun when both the players and the referee were ad-libbing wildly and insanely. The referee would think up a strange setting; the players would think up funny characters, and everyone would bounce ideas off each other for as long as it seemed funny.

Then came *Treasure Trap*. Although *TT* has long since gone to that great rubber weapons factory in the sky, it was the progenitor of the Live Action Roleplaying hobby, and therefore perhaps the most influential game since *D&D*. *TT* introduced us to a new way of relating to our characters: real costumes, real swords, and even, on occasion, real bruises. LARP elements entered mainstream RPGs. Whenever two or more *Vampire* players are gathered together, one will suggest that they should dress up as their characters and hold a live action convocation. *Amber* fanatics are almost as bad.

And then *Pendragon* galloped into the fray, visor down, lance in place. *Pendragon* brought us face to face with something more terrifying than any balrog: the passage of time. Most of life is made up of mundane events, even the life of Sir Patrick the Personable. Only once a year would he go on an adventure, fight a battle or do anything that was worth a roleplaying session. So, in *Pendragon*, each week's game represents one year of your character's life. It follows that if you play your campaign on a weekly basis then in 12 months you will see your character age 52 years. Old PCs? Retired PCs? PCs with grandchildren? Our characters had suddenly acquired responsibilities and commitments – things that they cared about and were prepared to fight to defend. At long last, they had grown up.

This idea was also at the centre of *Ars Magica*, a game in which characters were firmly committed to their community, members of a sort of monastery of wizards. *Ars Magica* had one final twist up its rune-embroidered sleeve. Whether we were playing *Toon* or *Cthulhu*, we did at least know the difference between players and referees. *Ars Magica* tore this last page out of the rulebook, and declared that all players were equal. This was called 'troupe play' and has been a big influence on many modern games (*Vampire* in particular is a sort of tainted off-shoot of the *Ars Magica* bloodline.) The idea was that a playing group should work together to devise the game's setting; they would each control several characters; they would take it in turns to referee games. The focus moved away from individual PCs: the community itself was now the star of the game.

From mobs of vagabonds crawling around dungeons to settled communities and ageing heroes with families; from combat and mayhem to story telling and character building; from rules and miniatures to freeform games and live action – and our beloved hobby has been going barely 20 years. Will the next decade see even more radical changes? I don't know but (as Lister said) it's gonna be fun finding out.

WAR

Is your campaign getti

reckons that a quic

illustration by Dix

It's not the intention of this article to glorify war in any way; Instead we're attempting to illustrate the dramatic possibilities armed conflict creates in a roleplaying game's ongoing narrative – so any concerned citizens out there, please rest easy. This stuff isn't real.

Some good reads for referees after SF warfare source material are: *The Forever War* by Joe Haldeman, the *Dorsai* series by Gordon R Dickson, *Hammer's Slammers* by David Drake, *Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card, Iain Banks' *Culture* novels, *Starship Troopers* by Robert Heinlein and The *VCs* and *Rogue Trooper* strips from *2000AD*.

WAR! HUH. WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

Absolutely nothin' – at least in the real world – but for roleplayers and referees alike the clash of mighty forces presents a wealth of opportunities. Fortune, glory, fame and painful lingering death can be yours for the giving and taking. All in all, and as obscene as it sounds, a war can give a terrific narrative boost to any campaign, giving a solid framework to one that's just beginning or a fresh start to one that's flagging.

Roleplaying's essential core themes (for characters to be heroes, to right wrongs, to survive adversity and become greater for it) are showcased in fictional warfare. No matter what the environment, wartime is a breeding ground for adventuring possibilities. You can play it real and in-your-face painful with grunts knee-deep in blood-soaked mud, or cinema-clean with square-jawed heroes ripping tanks apart with their bare hands. However you play, where or whenever your world is, war is a fact of life (and death). While this article largely concentrates on SF and futuristic themes, the basic concepts here can be fitted into almost any gaming genre. To expand and grow, player characters need jeopardy, and wars provide it in spades.

The inspiration for this article comes from actual experience. I was refereeing a *Star Frontiers* campaign that was going nowhere; the PCs were acting as a freighter crew and getting bored with hunting pirates and hauling cargoes. On a whim I read an old first-edition copy of Kevin Siembieda's *Mechanoid Invasion* RPG and hit on the idea of dropping the alien invaders into my gameworld. Overnight the campaign was transformed from moribundity to being fast-paced and dynamic. In the end the PCs saved the galaxy and became universal heroes with enough experience points between them to sink a battleship.

War is hell, all right, but it's also a hell of a good story pivot.

DISTANT THUNDER

Unless they start one themselves, most characters' first hint that the stormclouds of war are gathering is when news from the front reaches home. PCs will find the day's paper (or vidfax or whatever) reporting skirmishes on some distant battlefield and the slide towards all-out war begins…

While it's more engaging to have your players involved from the outset, sometimes keeping them away can have a stronger effect. The PCs will be going about their usual business as the war starts to take effect, and little by little a wily referee can work in the odd hint that something is amiss. Perhaps mail arrives a little later, or certain consumables vanish from shops. The military will become more of an everyday presence and the police will be on the look-out for saboteurs. If the war is unpopular with the masses then demonstrations and riots might be frequent. For shadowy PCs operating on the edge of legality this could be a real problem; likewise it could be a boon to savvy black marketeers with the right connections.

Worlds on a war footing change complexion rapidly, becoming leaner and meaner as the luxury of peace is trimmed

off, and PCs living in them will have to follow suit. There's fertile ground here for a behind-the-lines campaign, playing resistance members in occupied territory or just opportunists carving out a living in the shadow of battle. War is so pervasive an influence that it will shift the PCs' home ground subtly even before the enemy comes over the horizon. And, sooner or later, they will come...

You're In The Army Now

Sooner or later your player characters will go to war. How they get there and why they go is as important to the campaign as the battle itself. Motivation is the key word here. In an up-and-running game, PCs may already be in some other line of work or involved in another organization, but if the war machine needs fresh bodies then the draft comes into play. They can enlist or be press-ganged or shanghaied into the force of your choice. Imagine the street samurai put into the infantry or the superhero in the special forces.

Depending on your background story, the PCs may even be responsible for the war, or be part of the military already. If they're raw recruits, a referee has hundreds of war movies from which to pilfer ideas on basic training, and there's room to run a mini campaign in this context. If they're already in the forces, they have a leg up, but their motivations must be considered. Do they think this is a just cause? If not, somewhere along the way a line will have to be drawn and they'll have to choose between duty and honour. Players used to doing as they wish in Civvy Street may not take kindly to barked orders from officers, and unruly characters will soon tire of KP duty or being busted and locked in the brig. Two solutions are to keep the party group together as some kind of autonomous unit (a ship's crew, a ➜

War Games Versus Wargames

Player characters around during wartime are likely to end up in a battle sooner or later, be it an urban firefight or a thousand-vessel fleet action around Barnard's Star.

Depending on the positions they hold – anything from poor bloody infantry to imperial commander – the conflict will be seen from a different perspective. Low-rankers on an outlying escort might not see much of the Battle of Barnard's Star, but the commodore and his aides will have the whole theatre of war to survey. If your players are captains and admirals, they'll likely want to run the battles themselves and introduce a whole new headache for the referee.

Many RPGs have add-on wargame systems and conversion rules that allow PCs to transfer roleplay skills into wargame bonuses, but often wargames and roleplaying are difficult to mix – a surprise hit can wipe out that major PC, a victory can derail a planned plot development and force the referee into a frantic rewrite.

Some referees can rise to the challenge of the preparation and rules juggling needed to run this kind of sub-game, while others prefer a more abstract method of a few tactics rolls and a bit of atmospheric description. It's best to reach a consensus with your players first, rather than stopping the game to set up a board and dozens of counters unannounced. Don't be afraid to use a wargame you prefer to your RPG's add-on; Ground Zero Games' *Full Thrust* and *Dirtside* systems are a good bet, both simple and fast-playing.

BABY

. bit stale? Jim Swallow

r can work wonders.

TV & cinema sources for warfare include *Battlestar Galactica*, *V*, *Aliens*, *Space: Above And Beyond*, the *Star Wars* trilogy, *Robotech*, *Babylon 5*, *Battle Beyond The Stars* and *Enemy Mine*.

Some SF and near-future RPGs that come ready-packaged with their own easy-to-start wars are FASA's *MechWarrior* and *Legionnaire*, TSR's *Star Frontiers*, GDW's *Twilight 2000*, Steve Jackson Games' GURPS *Lensmen* and *War Against The Cthorr*, Task Force Games' *Prime Directive* and West End's *Star Wars*.

← strike team, a fighter squadron) with a degree of freedom under the auspices of the party leader, or to give them a more personal reason to obey orders. It could be that the girlfriend of one of the PCs was kidnapped by the aliens, that their homeworld was vapourised by the Death Star, or that the enemy commander is their estranged brother. The latter is a fun example of a motivation that can cause all kinds of merry hell when you least expect it. Don't be afraid to mix and match, either. Never forget that the best drama stems from characters, not contexts.

What Did You Do In The War, Daddy?

Warfare is filled with some of the best-known character archetypes in fiction. Favourites like the drill sergeant ("YEW MAGGOTS!"), the flyboy ("This is Red Five – I'm going in."), the commander ("Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!"), the new guy ("This is my wife and six kids.") and the hard-nose ("Charlie's out there on the wire.") are all off-the peg numbers with matching emotional baggage. While they're fun to play, they're fun to play backwards too (check out **arcane** 2's feature *Break The Mould!* for more on this).

The tough part in playing wartime characters is to resist the temptation to rehash the stereotypes, and instead to go for something fresh. Some players might be happy merely to dress up as the cast of *Aliens*, but striving for originality should be the order of the day.

Bear in mind that soldiers generally fall into two categories: those that fight because they want to and those that fight because they have to.

If the war constitutes your entire campaign from the ground up, it's likely the PCs will start out in the forces. As such, character types and skill packages will be limited or channelled into military ends, so talents farther outside the normal curriculum will take more explanation than usual – that pilot with a botany degree just happened to be the son of a crop farmer, for instance.

Here, characters will be groomed for war in the creation stage, while drafted PCs will gain 'bolt-on' bonuses to existing skills as well as brand new ones. Skill and talent levels can also be used to determine military rank and position as drafted characters join up, occasionally casting them against type.

Once again, the temptation is strong to load up on weapon proficiencies and combat skills, so referees should be wary of players forging 'power' characters that are able to castrate a fly at 200 yards with a laser rifle but unable to operate a simple computer terminal. Referees should feel free to penalise this kind of player with extreme prejudice.

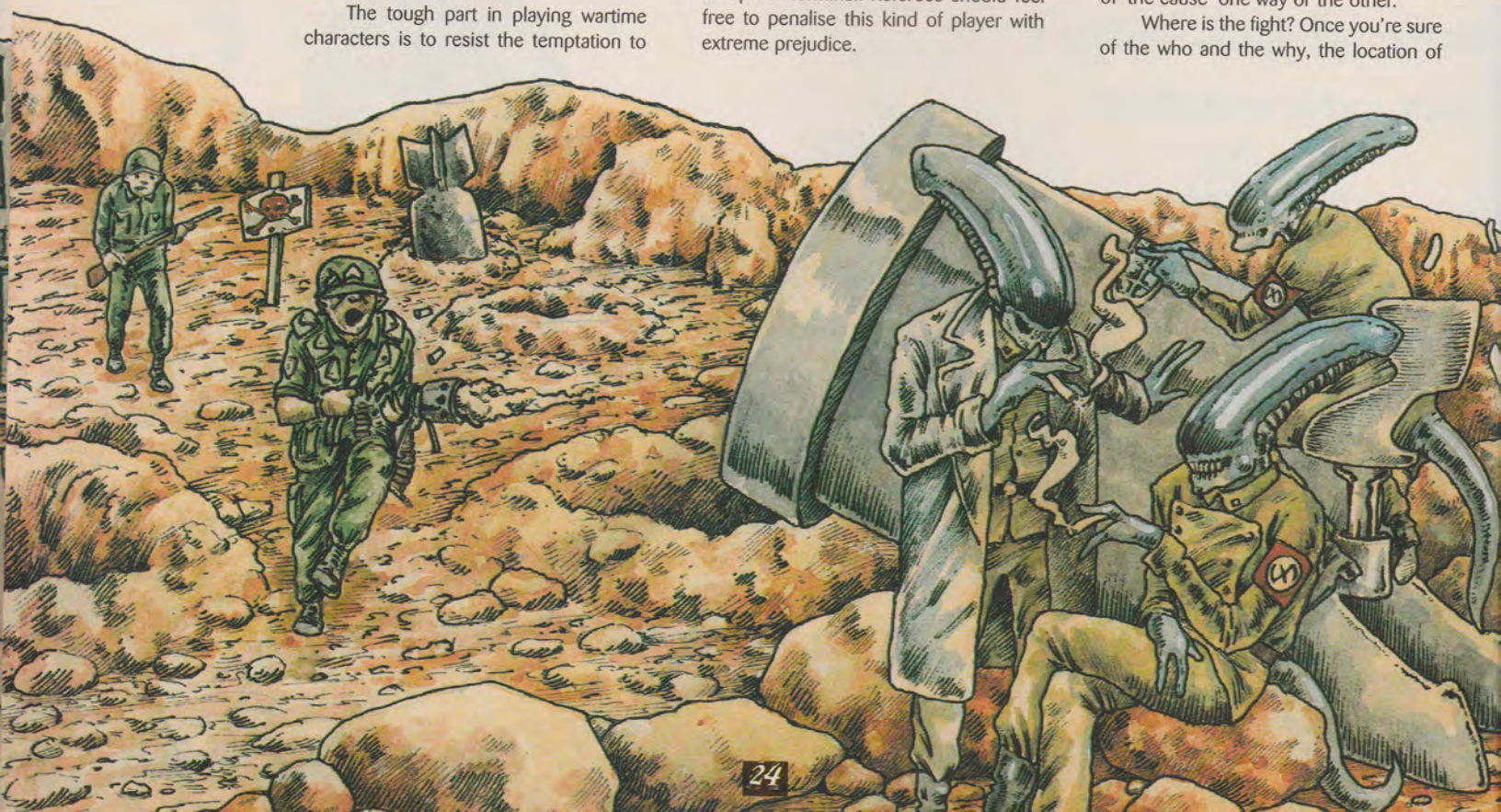
The Art Of War

To have war, you must have a foe to fight, and to fight you have to have a reason, however flimsy it might be. Before embarking on a war campaign, the referee has to create an enemy. The basic criteria are simple enough.

First, who is the enemy? Is it one power or many? Are they like the PCs? Depending on the gameworld context, the adversaries could be from a neighbouring country or aliens from another planet. Even a gang from the next city block needs defining. What are they motivated by? Are they invading or are they defending? Most wars are started by unfamiliarity and misunderstandings, so the foe will at the very least be of a differing culture, if not a different species.

Why are they the enemy? Is the point of the war to stop them taking over your world, or is it because they have something you want? If it's a fight for something material, look to the culture your players inhabit and find a need or a resource that the foe might possess or might want. The reason could be as arbitrary as the difference in the colour of their skin, or that they don't worship the fish gods like your players do. Whatever it is, this is your PCs' reason to hate the enemy and it will affect their perception of 'the cause' one way or the other.

Where is the fight? Once you're sure of the who and the why, the location of



the war comes next. Is the fight right on your doorstep, just streets away, or is it light years from home on some distant world? Location adds or subtracts familiarity, so characters far away will suffer different fears and hopes from those garrisoned close to home.

Scale is the final consideration. How big is your war and how big is the part the characters play in it? Scale need not be a physical measure; a turf war between street gangs might be just as brutal and as scarring to its participants as a nuclear exchange between continents. Instead, it's the degree of risk to the players and their world (however large or small it may be) – if they lose, will it mean the end for all of them, or could they survive? It also relates to the characters' roles. Are they sideliners, bit players in a greater story that will come to a conclusion without them, or are they the fulcrum of the entire epic, with a great destiny to fulfil? The role a character plays in the story can also vary in relation to their actual 'job' role – for example, Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars* began as a mere farmboy but ended up as the hero of the Rebel Alliance.

The Aftermath

"Some day this war's gonna end." So said Colonel Killgore in *Apocalypse Now*. Eventually, after days or decades, warfare burns itself out. Peace breaks out, treaties are signed or forces surrender, but one way or another the fighting ceases. Wars seldom result in stalemates, and after the shooting stops the complexion of the gameworld will have changed sharply. The most important question is: did the players win? If the answer is yes, then the characters may be treated like heroes when they return home, showered with medals and accolades. Alternatively, they might find that all is different, with old friends and lovers gone, and the lingering shadow of the fight still clinging to them. If the war was unpopular at home, they might be treated like outcasts.

If the PCs were on the losing side, things will be even worse for them. If they were high-profile personalities, they might be convicted of war crimes or betrayed by their own side to appease the new rulers. The characters' home territory might have been destroyed or annexed by the enemy, with people living under conditions worse than during the war. Here, the players could carve out new careers as pirates or resistance fighters attempting to overthrow the enemy.

Again, turning an idea on it's head also makes for interesting gaming: what if life under the rule of the invaders was actually better? PCs caught up in the aftermath of war may find themselves doomed to repeat history unless they can forge a lasting peace or land the final blow. While it's always gratifying to deal the killing stroke to a worthy foe, there's something to be said for holding out the olive branch of peace.

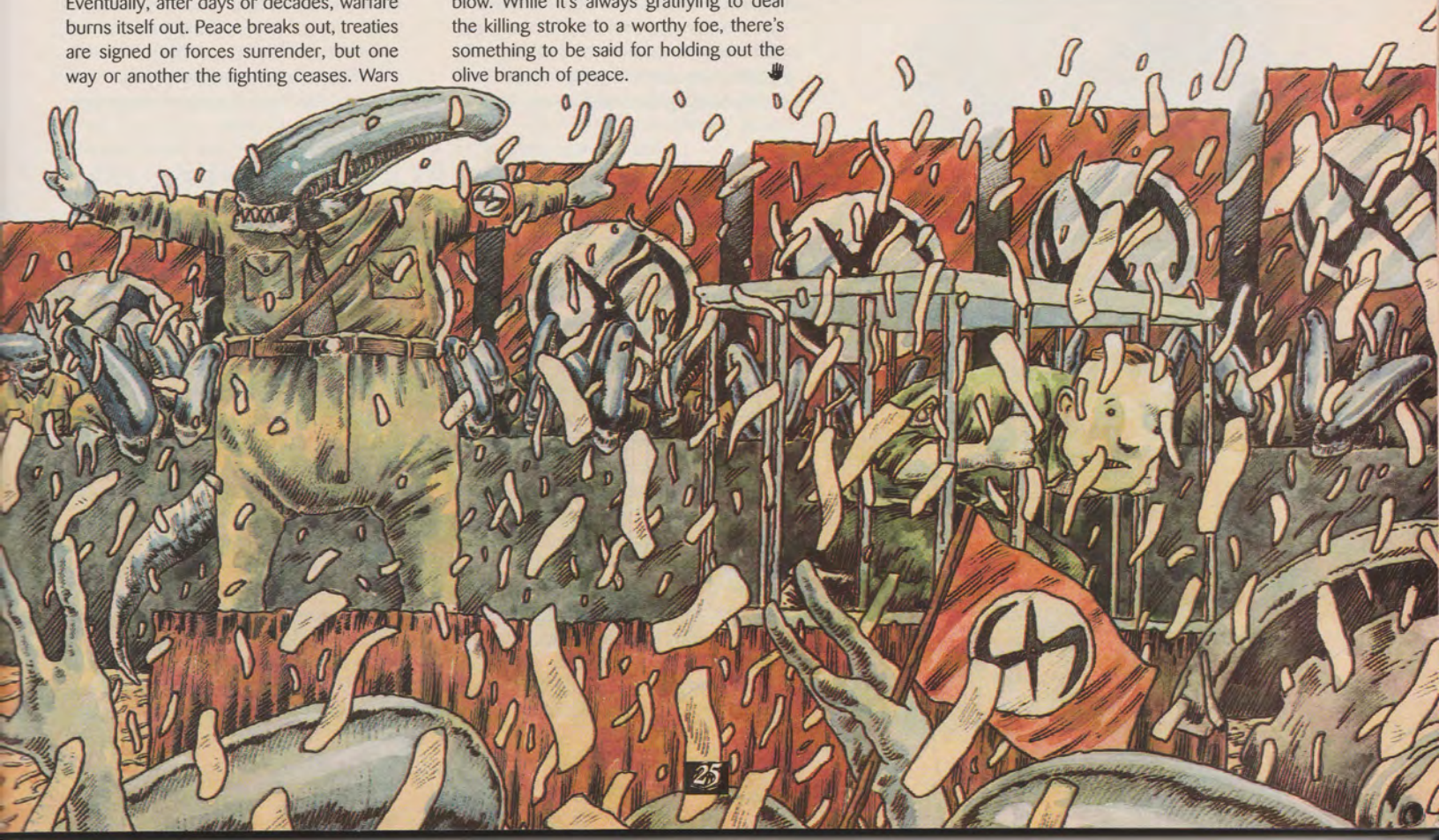
The Real Made Unreal: Learn From The Experts

One of the useful things about wars is that there are so many of them, real as well as fictional ones. Thanks to the violent nature of our species we've been fighting them for ages, and we're now quite expert at it.

Much has been made of warfare in the form of books, movies and TV series. If you're a referee looking for a quick off-the-peg conflict, or you need a war to take place off-camera or behind the scenes, an easy way to fill the gap is to take a real historical conflict and transplant it to your RPG's setting. For example, Vietnam becomes the Moon, with the Mars-backed Sea Of Rains Compact in the North fighting the Southern Luna States and their UN allies.

You're free to cut and paste as you see fit, to follow or ignore your model as the mood takes you (providing you're consistent, of course). So long as you make enough changes, the players will be too busy cowering in craters to notice that Clavius City is a lot like Saigon or that the sub-orbital attack shuttles are really B-52s.

Using real-world examples as the inspiration for wars in a fantasy setting is even easier. As you go farther back in history the real and fantastical technological environments begin to marry up. Consider replaying the Punic Wars in *RuneQuest* or running the American Civil War with magic instead of muskets in the *Forgotten Realms* campaign.



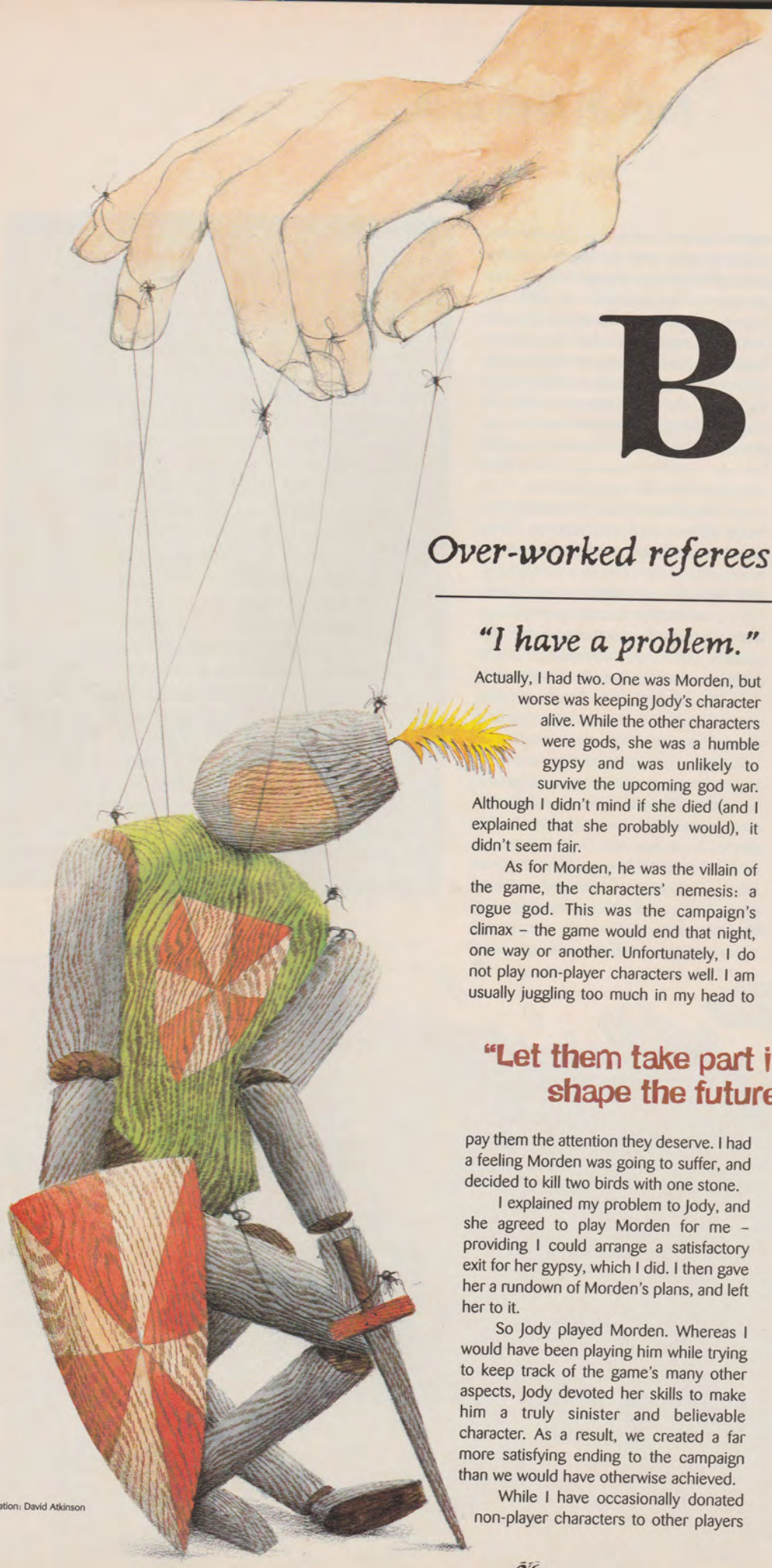


illustration: David Atkinson

BIT

Over-worked referees should get their pla

"I have a problem."

Actually, I had two. One was Morden, but worse was keeping Jody's character alive. While the other characters were gods, she was a humble gypsy and was unlikely to survive the upcoming god war. Although I didn't mind if she died (and I explained that she probably would), it didn't seem fair.

As for Morden, he was the villain of the game, the characters' nemesis: a rogue god. This was the campaign's climax – the game would end that night, one way or another. Unfortunately, I do not play non-player characters well. I am usually juggling too much in my head to pay them the attention they deserve. I had a feeling Morden was going to suffer, and decided to kill two birds with one stone.

I explained my problem to Jody, and she agreed to play Morden for me – providing I could arrange a satisfactory exit for her gypsy, which I did. I then gave her a rundown of Morden's plans, and left her to it.

So Jody played Morden. Whereas I would have been playing him while trying to keep track of the game's many other aspects, Jody devoted her skills to make him a truly sinister and believable character. As a result, we created a far more satisfying ending to the campaign than we would have otherwise achieved.

While I have occasionally donated non-player characters to other players so that they can have some fun, I have rarely seen other referees doing the same. Yet players seem to revel in these temporary roles. They enjoy playing bit parts every now and again – it makes a pleasant change. So why aren't more referees doing it?

If nothing else, creating bit parts for players helps cure that eternal game-killer: boredom. Boredom usually increases as the number of players rises, and in a group of four or more players at least one person is inevitably excluded from the action and therefore bored. I blame the 'adventure party', an artificial construct whose sole purpose is to allow a bunch of friends to roleplay together. But once players develop complex motives for their characters, they stretch the constraints of the 'group'.

"Let them take part in the events that will shape the future of their world."

Something has to snap, and usually it's the party.

I once ran a *Call of Cthulhu* game in which I knew that the investigators would be outclassed if bullets started flying. To assist our heroes, I introduced an old friend: Christian, a shell-shocked veteran of the Great War. Being an old friend is usually lethal in *Cthulhu*, and I didn't rate Christian's chances of survival too highly. But things didn't work out that way.

In the course of the adventure, the investigators had a minor falling out. The character of one of the players, Tony, could no longer justify spending time away from his business. Yet the investigation wasn't over! So we agreed

D ARTS

give them a hand, suggests **Steve Hatherly.**

on a compromise: the investigator left and Tony played Christian.

Since Tony had already seen Christian's flaky state of mind in action, I let him take control unassisted. Had I planned something specific for Christian, then I would have provided guidelines. As it was, Tony took liberties that he wouldn't have taken with his own character and enjoyed the game more than he would have done if his character had (uncharacteristically) stayed to the finish.

Tony's portrayal was invaluable when Christian returned. Quirks and references I wouldn't have thought of were waiting for me to call on.

You might argue that if players take on bit parts too often they may play those parts to further their own characters' ends. However, experience has shown me that this is not usually the case.

Take, for instance, the trial. The trial took place after a character was caught in the act of spying on some soldiers. While I could have skipped straight to the exciting rescue scene, I decided that a proper trial, with judges, a prosecutor and defence (all played by the players, while their own characters were elsewhere) would be entertaining.

I had it in my mind that the accused player would eventually be found innocent, but the trial went against all my expectations when his story fell apart under scrutiny. There was nothing for it – the accused was sentenced to death.

When players take on other roles strange things occur. The trial led to complications that would not have arisen had I merely rolled the dice. For example, a judge took a shine to the character defending the accused, and this unexpected turn of events presented the players with an unusual option while they considered how best to rescue their doomed colleague.

Once players are familiar with bit parts, you may consider the next stage: scenes where everyone plays a bit part. I once played in a routine science fiction bug-hunt game that involved lots of combat. We had been playing for a few weeks when suddenly we faced a completely different situation. An alien ship was orbiting Earth, and the referee wanted us to play diplomats visiting the ship. How we reacted and the events that occurred would influence our next mission. (This could have been a rescue operation for the diplomats, or a mission to destroy the aliens. Maybe, if things went well, an alien marine would accompany us next time.)

If you are running a living, breathing world, there may be occasions when kings and heads of state meet, corporations negotiate or mafia conspire. None of these are immediately relevant to the characters but may affect the world around them. If there is opportunity, why not let the players act out those parts? Let them see firsthand what happens when the king chooses a new bride. Let them take part in the events that will shape the future of their world. And who knows, perhaps the events that unfold will send your campaign spinning in directions you had never considered?

As well as curing boredom, providing players with bit parts generates a wealth of possibilities. Not only do the players create new avenues to explore, they also get to do something a bit different. And everybody enjoys a change now and again. Best of all, this creative energy is free – the players do it all for you.

Roru prayin

Manga, animé, replays, GURPS young female pro

Paul Mason investigates the rather

Even the official *D&D* books in Japan are illustrated with Manga. Believe it or not, the characters above are *D&D* thieves; below is a pair of fighters, and at the bottom of the page are a couple of dwarves.

To the right is *GURPS Ring*Dream*, the young female professional wrestling supplement. When we asked Steve Jackson what he thought of it he had to confess that he'd never seen a copy. And strangely he has no plans to bring out an English-language version.

Japan is a country that can make normally sane writers start to gibber about inscrutability, mystery and inexplicable otherness. Everything about Japan seems so strange to the outsider that it's difficult to establish an order to the mass of chaotic impressions that the country presents. And nowhere is this more true than in the field of roleplaying.

Perhaps the strangest thing about Japanese roleplaying is that, once you start to understand it, it isn't as far out as you might expect. In fact, the vast majority of it isn't far out at all – it's directly copied from the West. The fantasy setting so successfully developed in *D&D* forms the backdrop to most Japanese games, so it's no surprise to find *D&D* itself up there as one of the most popular Japanese RPGs. As you can see from the pictures on this page though, the Japanese 'spin' for *D&D* is the overwhelming presence of manga art that reinterprets our clichéd ideas of character classes in an almost unrecognizable way.

The computer scene is similar. In Japan computer gaming means Nintendo, Sega or Sony, so local efforts such as the *Final Fantasy* saga dominate, with a US rearguard action being fought by the likes of the *Wizardry* and *Ultima* series. Almost without exception they too feature manga art.

Manga mania

So what are these manga that dominate Japanese roleplaying? Comics, that's what. Japan produces more comics than the rest of the world put together. We're not talking skimpy Marvel-comic-sized efforts: a typical manga is a great walloping doorstep. Manga are the preferred reading matter of the majority – young and old alike – so their subject matter encompasses business, suicide methods, the constitution, sado-masochism and haemorrhoids. Most manga, though, are dedicated to light entertainment: sex, sport, science fiction and swords & sorcery.

An entire comic-based vocabulary has developed. Visually, there are the huge-eyed creatures that populate manga; linguistically, there's a phenomenal battery of sound effects to

gu, anyone?

onal wrestling – they do things differently over there. liar world of Japanese fantasy gaming.

express every sound you can imagine, and many you can't. This vocabulary carries over into the world of Japanese animation, or animé. Improbably huge eyes, improbably long legs, characters distinguishable only by hair colour (in a country where almost everyone has black hair), flamboyant costume (or lack of it) and primary colours are the norm. These elements have made Japanese animation a world leader. They even spill over into live action; where do you think *Power Rangers* came from?

Japanese kids live and breathe manga. Aside from text books, all their reading matter is likely to be in manga form. The art that looks so kitsch and stylised to us is regarded as utterly normal by Japanese kids. To them it's the artwork of Western roleplaying games that seems exotic.

This is *GURPS*, manga-style. As you can see, the presentation is a little more colourful than that of its Western counterpart.

The worlds of manga, RPGs and computer games feed each other. As Japanese companies excel at cross-marketing, it's often hard to tell in which field a product began. Is it the toy of the animé of the Nintendo game of the manga? Or the manga of the animé of the roleplaying game?

Ah yes, roleplaying...

Worlds of wonder

You thought I was kidding when I mentioned the animé of the roleplaying game. I wasn't. The computer game *Final Fantasy* has its own animé show, and a pencil-and-paper game called *The Record of Lodoss War* has spawned an even more successful animé series. You can't tell whether some of the recent fantasy worlds originated in manga, animé or roleplaying form. Most RPGs in Japan, though, are direct descendants of *Sword World*, the country's most popular roleplaying game.

Sword World is an interesting case to look at to give you some idea of what a Japanese RPG is really like. Although it wasn't the first Japanese-designed game (*The Roads To The Lord* claims that distinction), it was the first to be released in small-book format, which is probably the cause of its extraordinary success. It enabled *Sword World* to be sold in Japan's bookshops alongside the *Fighting Fantasy* series, leaving its competitors to languish in

A couple of manga-mangled magic users. Brings back memories of that *D&D* cartoon, doesn't it?

Just about all *D&D* manga characters are improbably leggy, with the exception of the plump priest, natch. And don't you just love the elves' floppy dog ears, below?

THROUGH THE MANGLE

A lot of the terms used in Japan come either straight from English ('RPG', 'player', 'session', 'game master' and so on) or are completely Japanese (for example 'teibansaigenkei RPG', which means a scripted game). But it's not quite that simple. Despite pouring billions of yen into teaching written and spoken English, the Japanese just can't leave well alone.

Part of the problem is pronunciation. There are many English sounds that don't exist in Japanese – the most well known being the letter 'l'. As such, when an English word gets imported into Japanese it is modified to suit Japanese pronunciation. The problem is compounded by the Japanese delight in coining new words, or chopping and changing old ones to suit themselves. Now and again this produces a winner, like 'tabletalk' (see the table at the right). At other times...

Even in their own language, the ever-playful Japanese can't help messing around. To give you some idea of the sort of vocabulary you'll have to master if you want to make a splash in the Tokyo roleplaying scene, here's a crash course:

Pronounced	From	Meaning
Otaku-	Fan	Maniac
Yuuzaa	User	Anyone involved in a roleplaying game, player or referee
Teiburutohku	Tabletalk	A face-to-face RPG
Kyara	Chara(cter)	Player character
Manga		Japanese comic
Animé	Animation	Japanese cartoon
Famicon	Family computer game	Nintendo, Sega etc
Ripurei	Replay	A write-up, manga or otherwise, of a game session. See 'Replay It Again, Sam'
Gaapusu	*GURPS*	No, seriously...
Baakohdo atama	Bar code head	Y'know Rab C Nesbitt's hair style? Well...

The number of imported games stocked in Japanese games shops over the last five years has drastically reduced as the home-grown ones have found their feet.

Guardian Heroes, above, is the latest 'true RPG' for the Sega Saturn console; while the graphical technology of *Virtua Fighter 2*, below, could revolutionise computer-based roleplaying games if Sega put their muscle behind it.

specialist game shops. *Sword World* has also been generously supported with supplements, adventures, magazine coverage and the uniquely Japanese idea of 'replays' (see the 'Replay It Again, Sam' panel).

For many people, *Sword World* was the first Japanese-language roleplaying game they experienced, and its devotees are fiercely loyal. Don't expect an English-language translation of the game, though. There's nothing in it – not in the rules or the eponymous world that accompanies them – that hasn't been directly lifted from American games of the '70s and '80s. Most Japanese non-*Sword World* fans regard it as altogether lacking in 'charm points'.

The book format, however, was clearly a winner. One of the foreign games tussling with *Sword World* is the translation of *GURPS*, which has been rather cleverly marketed. It was released in small-book format, and Japanese writers were encouraged to develop their own supplements. The result is that Japanese *GURPS* now sports a dazzling array of manga-decorated supplements, mostly set in proprietary fantasy worlds. It has also inspired some sourcebooks weird even by *GURPS* standards: anyone for GURPS *Ring*Dream*, the game of young female professional wrestling?

Other foreign games have tried the same tack: *D&D* adopted the small-book format, and for a while *Warhammer* gave it a go. Now, though, both have been ditched. The Japanese are now so adept at parroting Western fantasy clichés and roleplaying design that they don't need the originals.

Of the other Western games to make an impact on Japan, the incongruity of two makes them stand out. One is *James Bond 007*. Although it has never been translated, it is cited by many Japanese designers as a major influence because of its task-resolution system and its hero points. The other is *Torg*. Maybe because it lends itself to the free-for-all anything-goes style of manga, and because it has plenty of supplements (quickly translated into Japanese), *Torg* has carved out a niche for itself in Japan.

CARD CRAZY

And, of course, there's *Magic: The Gathering*. Despite being (until recently) untranslated, it has been just as big a hit here as anywhere else. Given how difficult some of the cards are to understand for non-native English speakers, that's some success. A translation has just appeared, but others are hard on its heels: *Doom Trooper*, for example, numbers Japanese as one of its 13 languages. Judging by the past, the first

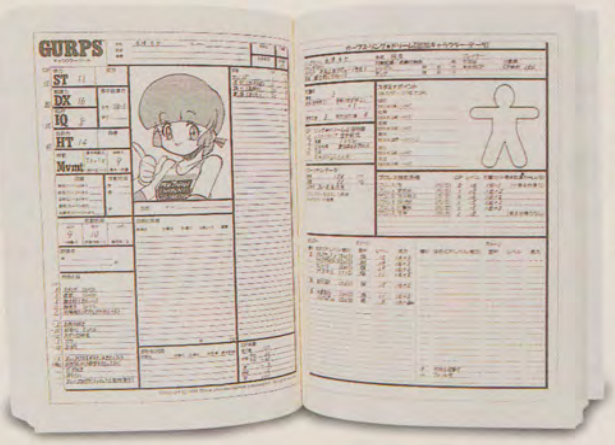
Japanese trading card games won't be around for another year or two, and when they arrive they'll be carbon copies of their Western cousins, but with the inevitable manga art.

Home-grown heroics

You may think I'm being harsh in describing Japanese roleplaying games. There are a few gems and novelties, but overall, as with manga, it's a sea of blandness. With Japanese designers the same word keeps cropping up: 'manpower'. They don't worry about creativity: it's just a matter of getting the manpower together to assemble a new game. The Japanese approach game design in much the same way that they approach auto manufacturing.

As in the car market, copies abound. Once *GURPS* established itself as a success, a Japanese company just had to come out with a generic, universal system called *WARPS* (Wild Adventure Roleplaying System, if you must know). It's a trend you'll see repeated again and again, not least in the various 'tributes' to *Cyberpunk*.

It's not all imitation, though. Apart from the aforementioned *GURPS Ring*Dream*, there's the *Sangokushi Engi* (*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*). Produced by Koei Corp, the computer games giant specialising in historical strategy games, it's based on a Chinese legend of the third century. While it owes a lot to *D&D*, it features an atmospheric version of that favourite of Japanese designers: the hero-points system from *James Bond 007*, in which characters have specific hero abilities tied to little phrases, such as 'you think your puny arrows are going to harm me?' or 'isn't there anyone here brave enough to face me?'



Soemthing else uniquely Japanese is the *RPG Fortune Bag*, an annual anthology of roleplaying games and backgrounds, perfect for those who favour rules-light games or like to tinker with rules. Containing half a dozen games for a tenner, it's an idea that might profitably be taken up by some Western publisher.

Japan's games designers have also come up with *Tokyo NOVA*, which is a sort of romantic cyberpunk game using cards (I know it's hard to imagine, but it's true). Although the cards are similar to those of *Everway* – they're identified with the Tarot – they're more prosaic and a little less, well, Californian.

Kotetsu no Niji is one of those peculiar games that you knew the Japanese would produce. Set in 1937, in a small country that borders Germany and Austria, it features Giant Robot Panzers. It is based on a successful computer game, which in turn was based on... a successful manga. I expect you're beginning to understand the way things work here by now. And I'm sure the appeal of fighting the Nazis in a 1930s Mekton is equally obvious.

If you have an ounce of interest in Japan you're probably wondering if there are any samurai games. Of course there are. My favourite is *Daikatsugeki*, which describes itself as the game of TV samurai dramas. It's no more 'realistic' than *Bushido*, but it has the considerable advantage of being set in a genre with which its players are intimately familiar. Japanese samurai dramas all have the same plot and, despite the preponderance of 'chambara' fighting, you rarely lay eyes on a drop of blood. *Daikatsugeki* features the same kind of task-resolution/hero-points mechanics found in almost all Japanese games. It concentrates on providing plenty of concrete background and copious illustrations of period buildings and scenery, something that's often neglected in our games.

Magic: The Gathering – even without a translation it's still managed to take over Japanese magazines.

Conventional characters

One of the most distinctive trends to emerge recently in Japanese gaming is the scripted game. Here, the players know pretty much what's going to happen in the scenario, so instead of enjoying the unexpected, the players can concentrate on really getting into their roles. In Japan, where knowing your place and fitting in are so important, it's not surprising that such a style of gaming should be warmly received and it's interesting to contrast it with Western society's concentration on 'independence' and the vehemence that one so often hears directed towards referees who 'railroad' their players.

Games that haven't been translated into Japanese include the *World of Darkness* series and, surprise surprise, *Bushido*.

Scripted gaming is also admirably suited to play at conventions. The Japanese are loath to entertain at home, which means that clubs flourish and mini-conventions have become a common fixture. While most of the action takes place in Tokyo, even a city such as Nagoya (a Japanese Birmingham) boasts seven or eight conventions every month. While fairly small (a capacity of 250 is on the large size), these regular events give gamers an opportunity to meet each other and experience a wide variety of systems. Because they are organised by gamers for gamers, the emphasis is on playing: people save their shopping for visits to games shops. It was through this convention network that *Magic: The Gathering*, despite the linguistic hurdles, spread so rapidly among Japanese gamers.

The Japanese created the giant robot genre but US companies dominate the associated roleplaying market. The Japanese are fighting back, though: Bandai are currently engaged in a legal battle with FASA.

The Japanese *GURPS* owes much of its success to clever marketing: its release in a small-book format meant that it made it into plenty of Japanese bookshops, and writers were encouraged to develop their own supplements.

漫画 feature

Replay It Again, Sam

One of the biggest problems with roleplaying has always been explaining how to do it (as discussed in Andrew Rilstone's column in arcane 4). This has been particularly worrying for the self-conscious Japanese.

Their solution is ingenious: replays. A replay is a blow-by-blow account of a gaming session. It may be told in prose form, but many adopt the medium of manga to make their message clear and more accessible.

A replay portrays not only the characters and their adventures, but also the players and referee as they participate in creating the adventures; by showing exactly

This, believe it or not, is a manga *Magic: The Gathering* replay.

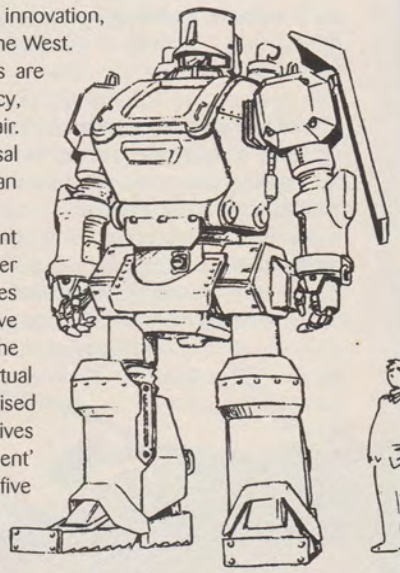
what the gamers say and do, replays give the lead to nervous purchasers and demonstrate what roleplaying is all about.

The success of these books is phenomenal. Most games sport more than one book solely composed of replays, and *Sword World* has volumes. Don't confuse these with game-related novels: the Japanese have plenty of those, too.

While campaign write-ups in the West have been a source of embarrassment more than anything else, in Japan they have become a flourishing industry in their own right. So much so that *Magic: The Gathering* replays are already starting to appear.

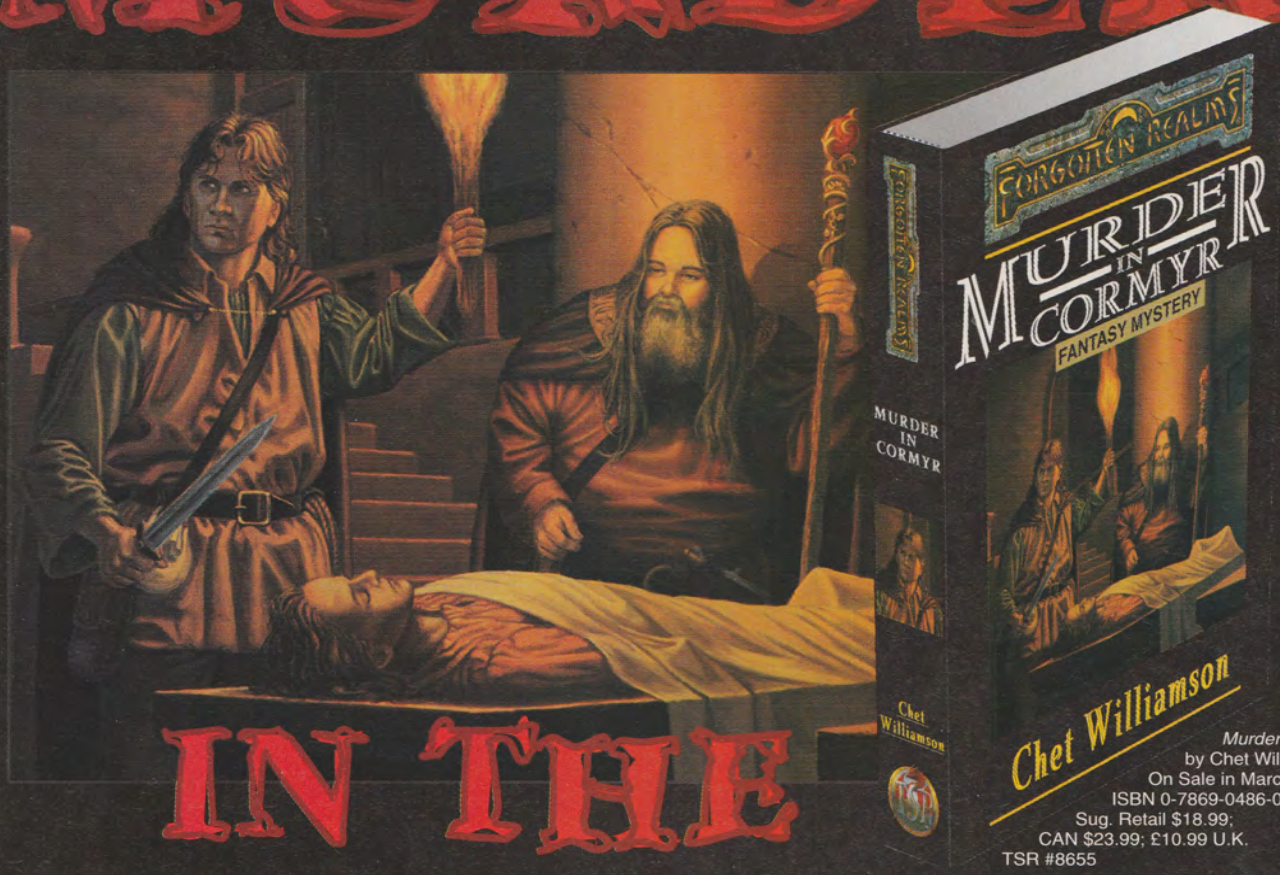
So as we can see, in terms of imaginative innovation, Japanese roleplaying has no great lesson to teach the West. Like its cars of the '60s and '70s, Japan's games are manufactured according to principles of efficiency, uniformity and saleability – with very little design flair. Whether the games can be made sufficiently universal to repeat the world-conquering act of Toyota, Nissan et al in the '80s is another matter.

If the Japanese are going to make a significant breakthrough it'll be in the world of technology. After all, this is the country that produced the video games *Virtua Fighter* and *Tekken*. Now that designers have ditched those boring old sprites of *Street Fighter*, the prospect of a roleplaying game in an electronic virtual world seems a little closer. Already Sega have realised that part of *Virtua Fighter*'s appeal is the ability it gives players to interact with others and a 'tournament' version of *Virtua Fighter 2*, in which teams of five challenge each other, has just been released. And this technology has wider implications. Graphical computer MUDs are already available, but imagine what could be done if the corporate muscle of Sega went to work in this field. If this is really where the future of roleplaying lies, then it's well worth keeping an eye on Japan.



Giant robot fans should check out *Kotetsu no Niji*, a game set in an imaginary Europe of 1937 in which you get to stomp the Nazis in Battlemechs – sorry, Jaegers.

MURDER IN THE REALMS



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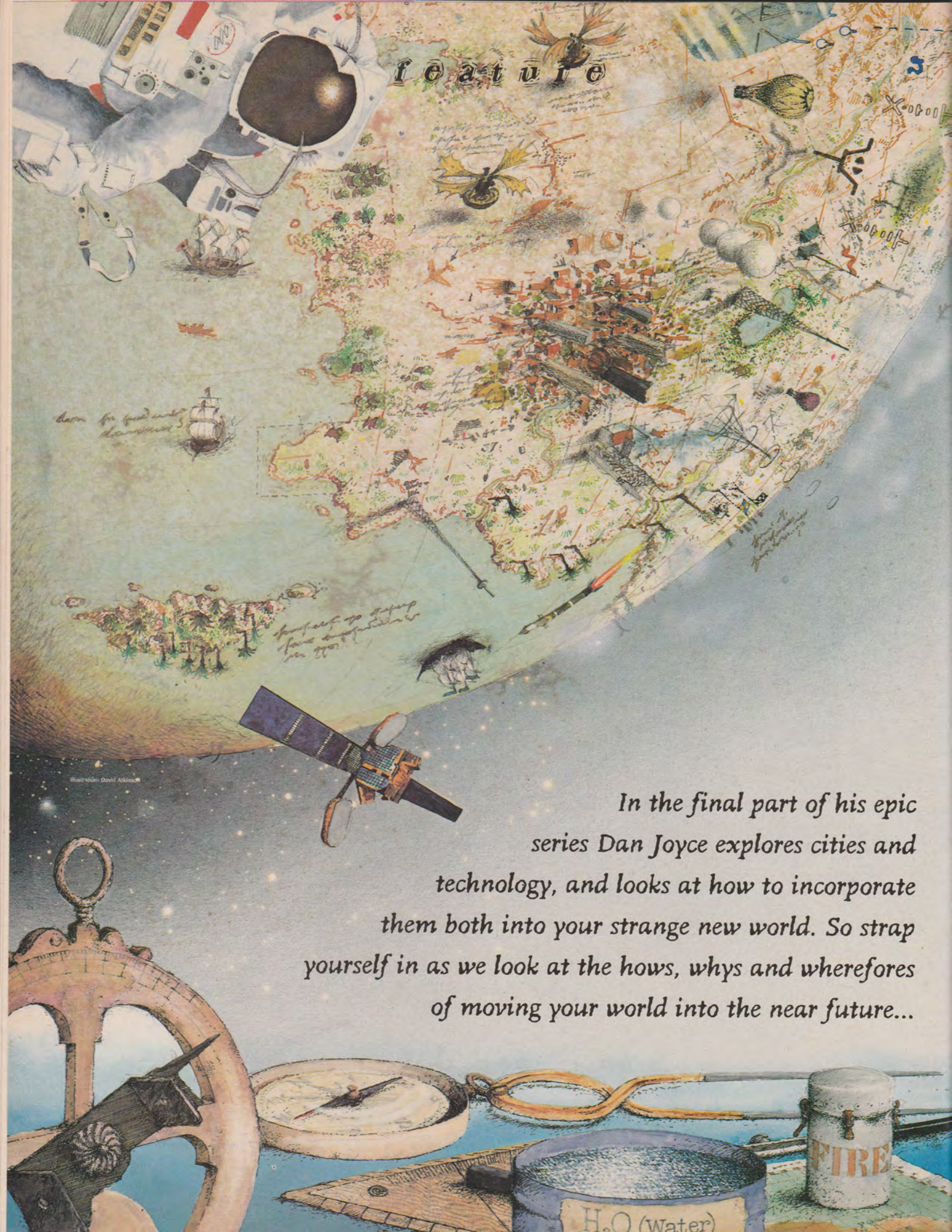


Illustration: David Atkinson

In the final part of his epic series Dan Joyce explores cities and technology, and looks at how to incorporate them both into your strange new world. So strap yourself in as we look at the hows, whys and wherefores of moving your world into the near future...

World builder part 5: Cities and Technology

City foundations

Settlements don't spring out of nowhere. They take root for a reason and grow – layer by layer, a bit here, a bit there – by a process of accretion. The only town or city you'll get if you start with nothing more than a pen and a blank piece of paper is a bland and soulless one. Like Milton Keynes.

Two main factors determine settlement patterns and growth: economics (why) and geography (where and how). Every settlement has to have an economic base, whether that's agriculture, fishing, forestry, mining, tourism… whatever. And it has to have access to basic living requirements: water, food, fuel and building materials.

Cities also need some sort of communication network (for instance, roads, rail, rivers, sea, airport or spaceport). Since a city's population density precludes everyone living off the land, food will have to be imported, even if only from outlying areas.

Given a civilization with enough resources, it's possible to import everything, as is the case on Pyrrus in Harry Harrison's *Deathworld*. You can even import the structure of the settlement itself, like the floating city in *Waterworld* or the satellite world of Freeside in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*.

As to the 'where', look at real-world maps for inspiration. Almost all big cities lie on rivers and/or coasts. No water: no major settlement. Desert dwellers are nomads (or live in river valleys such as that of the Nile). Tundra dwellers tend to be nomadic too, whereas an agricultural plain like that of the American mid-west gives rise to small towns and villages that are spaced out roughly equally around road intersections.

The form the town or city takes depends on the type of terrain of its locale (although not exclusively – it's harder to build into an estuary, but Venice proves that it is feasible) and, historically, on its defensibility. Forts were built on hills, mediaeval cities in meander loops, and so on. The more work the topography does, the less the people have to do in building walls and ditches.

Once established, a city tends to grow outwards along roads or rivers, eventually swallowing up its outlying settlements and transforming them into districts of the city.

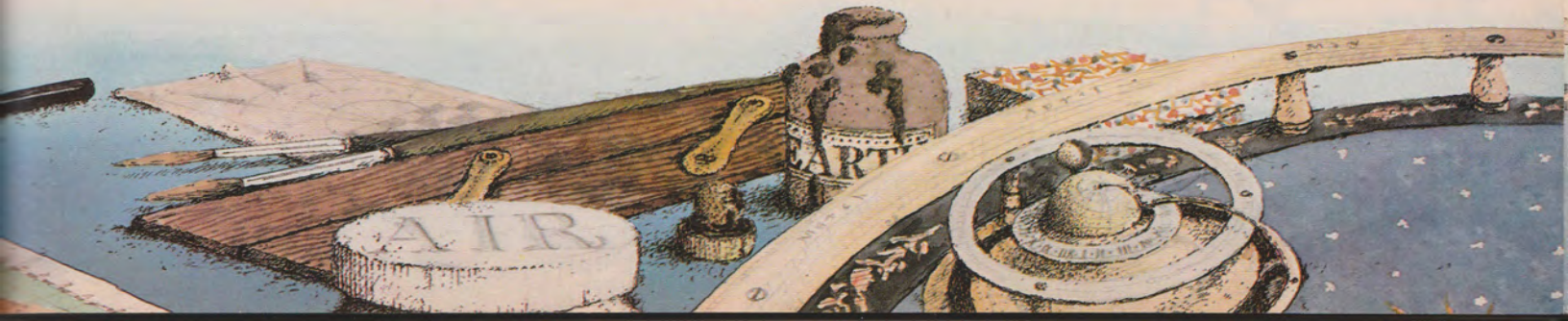
If you're running a modern or futuristic game, get hold of a current street map or OS map and adapt that. OS maps are available from as early as the 1800s, so they're handy for *Cthulhu* or *Cthulhu by Gaslight* referees. You can contact Ordnance Survey on 01703 792635.

Mapping the city

Once you know where your city is and why it's there, then, and only then, can you map it. First off, sketch geographical features such as rivers, marshes and mountainsides. Secondly, ask yourself: what has it grown up around? The docks or the spaceport? Start there and work outwards. Is it a market town on a crossroads? Draw the roads first, then fill in the details.

Don't forget that few cities are minty fresh and new. Show their age. Incorporate old parts of the city: the old perimeter wall now swallowed up by the new city; the disused docks and the decaying shipyards; the mediaeval church in a modern city; Big Ben in a future London. The city of Pavis in the *Runequest* world of Glorantha is interesting in that it is, in fact, Pavis 'outside the walls'. The original city, now the derelict Rubble, is behind it.

When building a city, bear in mind that size is relative. Historical cities were smaller than you might think. Babylon, the biggest city in the world in 600BC, had a population of just 80,000. The whole city state of classical Athens (including its rural inhabitants, slaves, foreign merchants and so on) had a population of less than →



The trouble with technology

Once you get into using advanced technology, you have to be careful to keep it all in check. Jump forward too fast and you end up scratching your head trying to work out what impact it would have on society. Take those transporters on *Star Trek*'s Enterprise. They don't make sense. Why not just have some bigger and better ones back on earth and forget the Enterprise altogether?

The problem is even more acute in Superhero games, which often incorporate fantastic technology while being based in present-day Earth. Spaceships, cybernetic devices, laser guns and so on are rife. And they seem, so... daft. They don't fit.

The *Wild Cards* series of novels by George R Martin and others does a creditable job of keeping everything together. But better still is Alan Moore's *Watchmen*. The hard-to-believe-in Dr Manhattan seems far more real and believable because of the role he plays: not bashing up bad guys but subtly changing society...

"The technology that Dr Manhattan has made possible has changed the way we think about our clothes, our food, our travel. We drive in electric cars and travel in leisure and comfort in clean, economical airships. Our entire culture has had to contort itself to accommodate the presence of something more than human, and we have all felt the results of this... We are all of us living in the shadow of Manhattan."

Go read it.

Wish you were here? Fun cities the arcane team have been stuck in:

1. Sanctuary (*Thieves' World*, Chaosium, out of print)
2. Bögenhafen (*The Enemy Within*, Hogshead, £8.95)
3. London (*Queen Victoria and the Holy Grail*, Games Workshop, out of print)
4. Pavis (*Glorantha*, Chaosium, out of print)
5. Irrilian (*White Dwarf* 42-47).

← 100,000. 14th century London had a population of 50,000. By contrast, modern-day New York has a population of around 9,000,000.

But whether there are 10,000 or 10,000,000 inhabitants, you'll never be able to detail everything and everyone in your city. Sure, you might map and detail some taverns and temples where you know the players will turn up, but do you really want to get bogged down with all those shops and houses?

Take this tip from Paul Vernon (which he used in his now out-of-print *Starstone* campaign): just detail a representative sample. So you want a street of leatherworkers and armourers in your city? Work out the details for one of them, giving the proprietor his own character, motivations, relationships with other city dwellers, and so on. Then if the players decide to visit an armoury, no matter which door they knock on they happen upon this particular one. It's certainly a lot easier than roleplaying everyone on the fly.

The situation becomes even more complex in the case of larger modern or futuristic cities. Obviously you can't map everything, so do no more than a street or street intersection in each sector. Design the floorplans for a typical shop, a typical house and so on. Don't go into massive detail, since these are improvisational aids only, although they could easily be used as the springboard for further scenarios.

And don't worry if the map doesn't look too inspiring afterwards. Unless you're a cartographer, it won't. It's the scenarios and storylines that hold the place together. The map for Sanctuary (in the *Thieves' World* books and the campaign pack by Chaosium) was nothing special, but the *feel* of the place was great.

The word on the street

Which brings us neatly on to the atmosphere of the city. The best-designed city in the world will fall flat if the players walk down silent, sterile streets, seeing, hearing and smelling 'nothing of interest'.

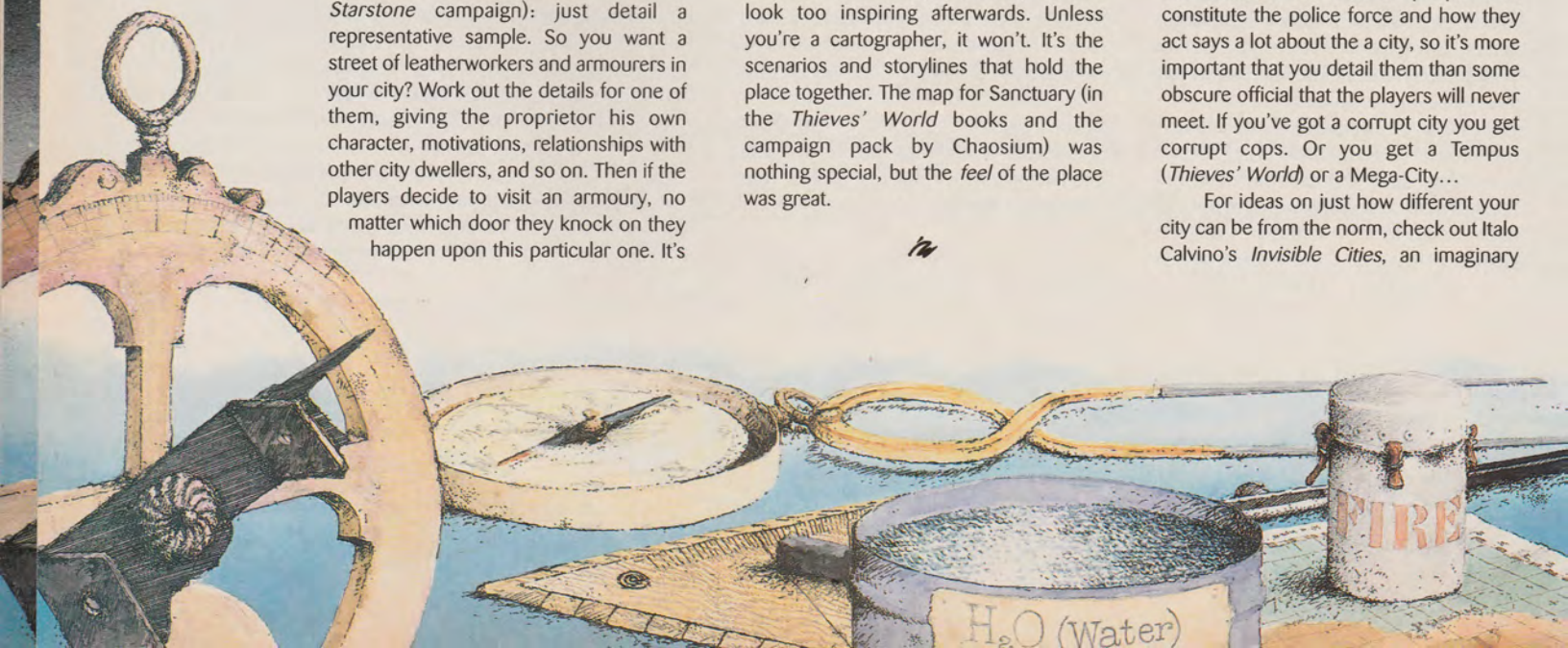
Atmosphere is everything. Take *Batman*'s Gotham: it's dark and brooding, all stone gargoyles and concrete canyons. Or the sets in *Blade Runner*, with their winking neon, urban decay, sushi stalls and gloomy weather. Great stuff! How different from that beatific rat-hole, Hobbiton.

Each different part of the city will probably have a character all of its own. Sanctuary has The Maze, New York has The Bronx. Docks stink of seaweed and outflow pipes, and are shrill with the sound of seagulls. A street full of armourers' shops would be ringing and clanging. And most mediaeval cities just stank, everywhere.

The defining factor of a city is its people. There are lots of them. They should be in the way, arguing, emptying chamber pots, rushing about, chatting, doing deals. Sure, you don't want florid descriptions every time the characters nip across the road to the tavern, but they're not walking through an empty film set either.

The question of city-based scenarios is best left to a separate article, but you do need to pay attention to how, and by whom, the city is run. Remember here that the most visible aspect of a city's organisation is its means of law enforcement. The kind of people who constitute the police force and how they act says a lot about the a city, so it's more important that you detail them than some obscure official that the players will never meet. If you've got a corrupt city you get corrupt cops. Or you get a Tempus (*Thieves' World*) or a Mega-City...

For ideas on just how different your city can be from the norm, check out Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, an imaginary



account of Marco Polo's travels as related to Kublai Khan.

The uses and abuses of technology

By this point you should have a pretty good idea of how technologically advanced your world is. If you're playing *GURPS* or *Traveller* then you'll have even assigned a Tech Level, which determines what is and isn't available.

Fantasy worlds, by some strange law, seem to be stuck with 14th century technology. Very dull. Shifting everything up or down the technology scale can make a huge difference. Try adding hot-air ships (they could even powered by fire elementals), gunpowder or sewers. *Warhammer*, whatever its faults as a game system, has bags more character in its late-medieval/renaissance world than most fantasy games can boast. Alternatively, you could try taking one step back in time to a dark-age era with no plate mail, no crossbows and no castles as such – this too will give you an entirely different world.

Technology can and does change society, but it doesn't change people. This is why all that '50s and '60s brave new world stuff is so much guff. People stay the same. We're more likely to emerge into the worlds of William Gibson (*Neuromancer*) or Jeff Noon (*Vurt*) than we are into those of *Star Trek* or *The Six Million Dollar Man*. Cybernetic enhancements and virtual-reality gizmos almost certainly won't go to the disabled, the needy or the righteous: they'll go to those who can buy them for hard cash, probably on the black market.

And initially they'll be developed, as is the case with so many real-world inventions, for use by the military. Score one point – and one point only – for that awful JC Van Damme and Dolph Lundgren film, *Universal Soldier*, over Isaac Asimov and his Three Laws of Robotics (which are, roughly: don't harm a human, obey humans, keep yourself intact, in that order). Given that the first use for robots would likely be in battle, the Laws don't really hold up.

One problem that seems to occur with high-tech games is that, particularly if you're playing a physicist, you can feel foolish, as if you're operating along similar lines to those '50s dreams of food pills, manned rockets to Jupiter and so on. It doesn't matter. Don't let the technology take over. For one thing, SF has always been ahead of technological development – ideas of Asimov and Clarke have set the pace for some real-world inventions – so you're in good company. And, secondly, the crucial aspect is how the technology is used in society.

If some boffin invents teleportation, with, er, microwave radiation being used to transmit disassembled bodies and, er, it's the end of travel as we know it – you're stalling. If some boffin invents teleportation, gets assassinated by a consortium of Swiss bankers and the device is stolen by the CIA or the Mafia – now we're talking. If you can't explain it, don't. Just go with it and explain the consequences.

"The best-designed city in the world will fall flat if the players walk down silent, sterile streets... atmosphere is everything."

Same world, different stuff

Since new technology only changes the trappings, not the people who use them, you can easily transpose scenarios forwards in time. That's why the *Seven Samurai* is still okay as the *Magnificent Seven*. It's just guns instead of swords – no problem.

In a futuristic city, with huge spire-like tower blocks, flying cars and an unwritten law that says 'height equals status', shanty towns won't be absent; they'll be on the ground. Likewise, bank robberies, drug cartels and so on will still exist in one form or another. It's possible they might not; we might get an egalitarian society like that of Iain Banks' *Culture*. But since we don't know, it doesn't matter.

Where it can become awkward is if you ignore the technological limitations of the past. Then you can get anachronisms that grate. Mediaeval hospitals, for instance, were not merely simpler versions of the ones we have today. Most of the doctors were operating (excuse the pun) on an entirely different level, bleeding the patient even when it might kill him so as to restore the balance of his 'four humours'.

Few of us are historians, so no game will be perfect. But even Shakespeare included some anachronisms. If you don't notice them, no problem.

Castles were not made defunct by the invention of gunpowder. They were already falling out of use the century before there were guns powerful enough to breach a castle wall, simply because the feudal society that created them was collapsing.

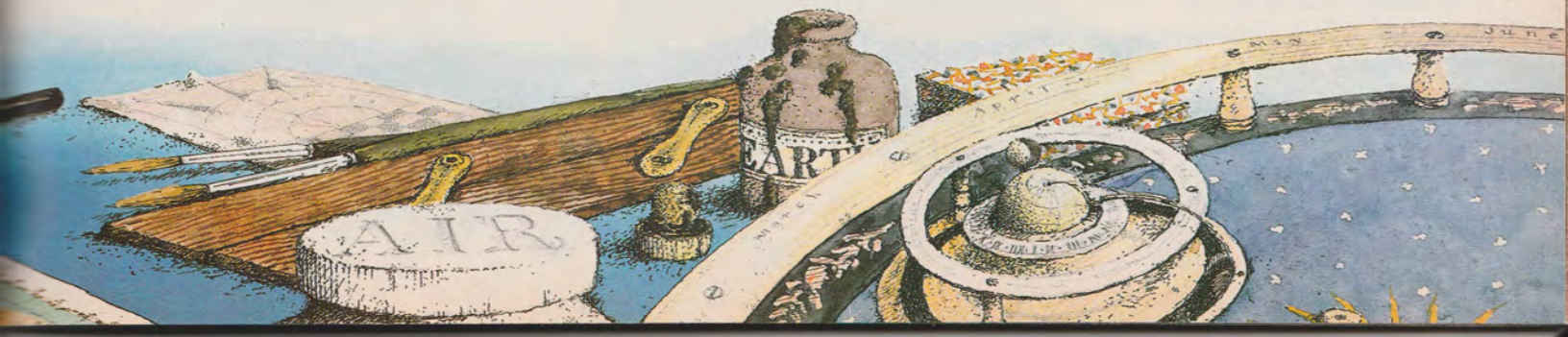
Brave new world

One of the biggest impacts technology can have on your game world is when it can create or dramatically alter the world itself: terraforming. Here we're talking about making barren planets capable of supporting human life, or creating a Niven-esque Ringworld. We looked at that back in issue 1...

Next Month

And so the circle is complete and the worldbuilding series is ended. Hope you all enjoyed it and found lots of ideas to get you going.

Next month we move things up a gear. All right, so you can make your own worlds, but what about designing your own game? Lee Brimmicombe Wood has a few ideas he'd like to share with you.



the source SPECIAL

At arcane, we appreciate the central importance of snack foods to the roleplaying table – so the source takes a diversion this month, down to the garage for some gaming goodies...

Twiglets

Use these Marmitey treats to make log-cabins, (they have to be licked heavily before they'll stick together). Alternatively, a pile of them produces a good representation of a camp-fire. Set fire to them and tell the other players interesting tales from your character's youth.

Cheesy Bicuits

These are like gold pieces. Throw handfuls of them at smithies and inkeeps to show you mean business.

Dry Roasted Peanuts

Amaze your friends with your gastronomic savoir-faire. Or just flick peanuts at the referee and be terribly annoying whenever you're bored.

Chocolate Biscuits

Annoy the most patient of referees by leaving a packet of heavily coated chocolate biscuits near the radiator for half an hour and then opening it up just after they've agreed to your inspecting the contents of their brand new boxed set edition.

Jelly Babies

With their dog-like snouts and extended bellies, these make excellent snotling miniatures. Eat the little monsters as they are slain, thereby keeping an accurate check of the number yet to be defeated. Players won't mind a bit of hack 'n' slash if there's a tasty gibberling to feast on every now and then.

Crisps

Many people consider these a good dinner substitute but they are not suitable for gaming evenings. Roleplaying with a mouthful of crisps is bad form.

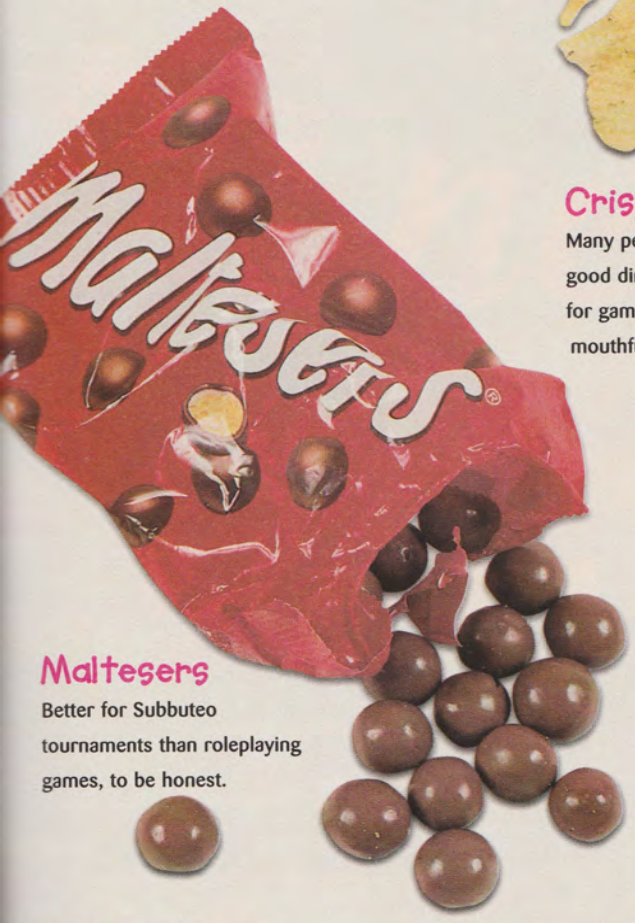
And the players said...

CLIFF "Pizza is the perfect modular dinner creation system; the referee lays out a sturdy, deep-pan base with tomatoes, basil, oregano and grated mozzarella, and players take it in turns to decide what topping they'll have, all in character of course."

JON "Yeah, right. I play a dwarf, so I'd add a generous sprinkling of smoke cured ham from my mountain village. But if I was a wizard, I'd cast 'Summon Anchovies', while, if I was an elf, I'd go into the woods to look for some edible fungus, or somesuch."

GIDEON "No man, you're both wrong. It's pig's trotters, with a hearty potato broth. If the party's in a village, that's what the peasants would eat. Not pizza but a good healthy dish of pig's trotters."

STEVE "Er, yes. Thank you, team. Crisp, anybody?"



Maltesers

Better for Subbuteo tournaments than roleplaying games, to be honest.

Spitted Goat

What better than a real goat roasting slowly on the gaming table? You might think. However, apart from the amount of firewood you'll have to gather on the way to the game, the sight of you leading a live goat into the dining room could cause raised eyebrows amongst your host's flatmates and assuring them you merely intend to eat the beast may not be enough to assauge their fears.

Carbonated drinks

Most magazines nowadays will go to any lengths to justify the inclusion of a picture of Pamela Anderson in their pages. Not so arcane, you'll be pleased to hear. We just print pictures of Virgin Cola bottles that are shaped like her. Rather sad, isn't it?

Marshmallows

These aerated treats can represent the skulls of your foe. As your dwarven hammer descends on its hapless victim's bonce, bring your fist forcefully down onto the marshmallow with a blood-curdling scream.

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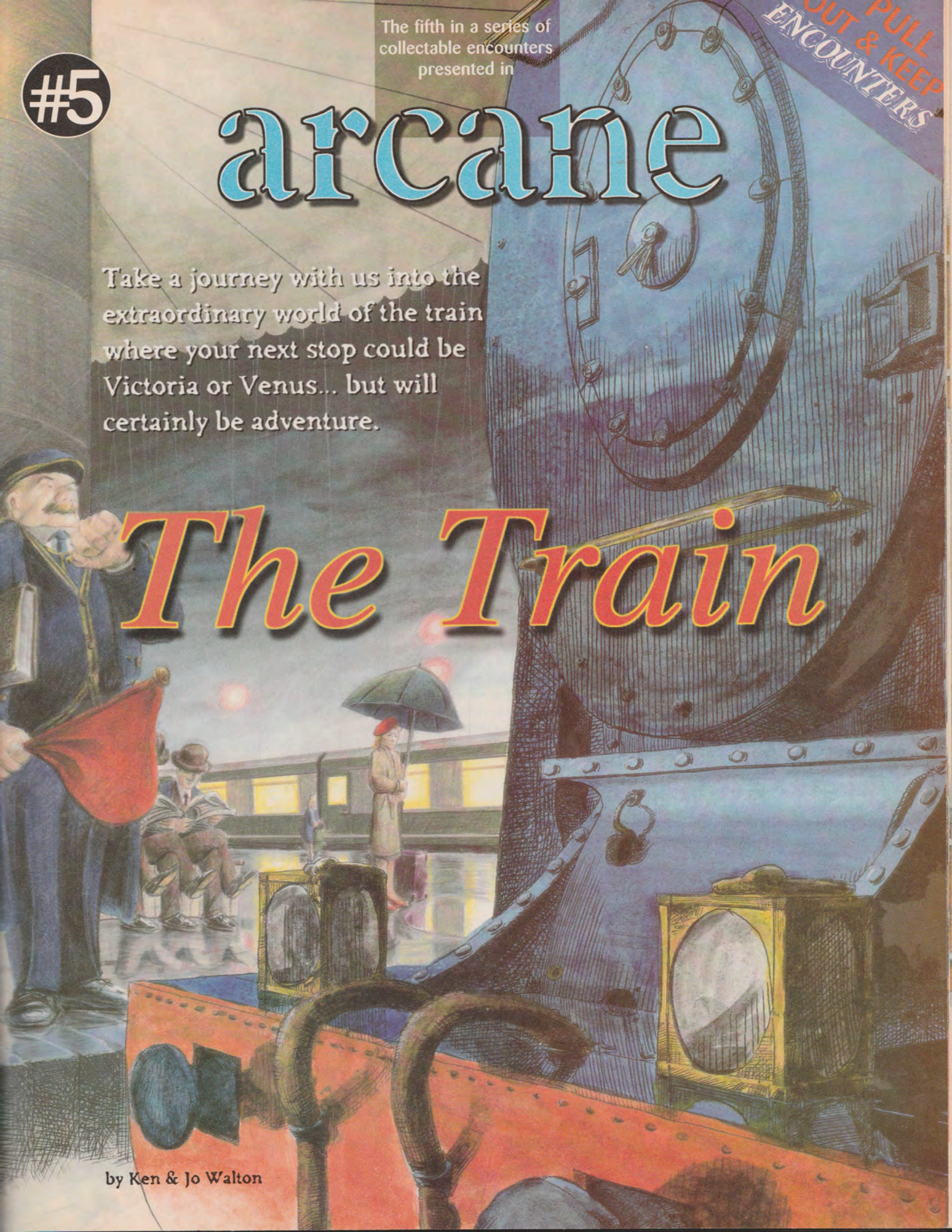
#5
The fifth in a series of collectable encounters presented in
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PULL OUT & KEEP ENCOUNTERS
Take a journey with us into the extraordinary world of the train where your next stop could be Victoria or Venus... but will certainly be adventure.
The Train
by Ken & Jo Walton

arcane *proudly presents another excellent 11-page scenario that you can use with any games system.*

the Train

I didn't catch the name of the station, or even see it properly through the streaming rain on the windows. It looked run-down and dilapidated, but the symbols on the signposts seemed strangely futuristic. I returned my attention to my paper as the train pulled out.

It was then that the stranger, hatless, rain dripping from his sodden mackintosh, leapt into the compartment. "Just made it," he said. "I didn't know they still ran steam on this line." He took off his coat, folded it and placed it on the luggage rack above his seat. Before settling himself he examined the mirrors and the woodwork of the carriage. He ran his hand across the brass curtain rail, as if admiring the workmanship.

The train went rattling over the lines, gathering speed. We passed briefly through a tunnel, and the carriage was plunged into darkness. As we emerged once more the train whistled, the two notes echoing in the night. I pulled out my watch and consulted it; almost time to make my way to the dining car. Thus it was that I could later give the detective the precise time, almost to the minute, that we heard the scream.

From the time the train pulls out of the station you're in a little moving world of your own, a world with a limited cast of characters and few ways to escape. A train provides an ideal location for a number of different kinds of adventures. This is a steam train, suitable as a modern steam-enthusiasts' train or a standard form of transport for any period from 1830 to 1960. The characters described are from 1930's Britain but need only slight changes to fit into any country or period.

Illustrations ©Simon Gurr & arcane

locations

The Carriage

The train may pull in to a platform on either side of the carriage, so both sides have doors. A corridor runs along one side. At the end of the corridor there are toilets and access to the next carriage along.

Inside the carriage are the travelling compartments: one second-class with seats in rows, the other a first-class sleeper. There are windows on both sides of the compartments, one side showing the corridor and the other the outside world

The System

You're a smart person, right? We don't need to patronise you with detailed rules on how to translate these people and events into your own system, do we? But just in case you're uncertain, here's a couple of tips. Whenever we do a character description (though there aren't too many in this scenario), we'll say something like 'Doctor Bloggs has a fine, incisive mind and this is complemented by a strong, athletic body. As a child, however, he suffered from a rare lung disorder that means he has difficulty in sustaining effort. He is also prone to making rather impulsive decisions.' In game terms this would mean that Doctor Bloggs has above-average strength, intelligence and dexterity and below-average constitution and wisdom. Exactly how much above and below average is up to you and the strength of your party of adventurers. This is also the case in systems that use levels. Give the encounter's characters the sort of levels that will make them a challenge for your players. You'll find similar descriptions of all important physical objects, such as 'the door is paper-thin' or 'this glass is bullet-proof'. Now stop reading this wibble and get stuck in.

as it speeds past. All of these windows have curtains. Above the seats are luggage racks made of metal mesh.

The Sleeper

Each sleeper compartment sleeps four people, separated from each other by curtains. During the day they sit beside each other on the lower bunks. At night the upper bunk is pulled down and the lower bunk is transformed into a bed. Both passengers whose bunks are on the same side of the compartment must retire and get up at the same time.

Sharing the compartment with three strangers may cause friction. On some trains, for an additional charge, it is possible to book a sleeper for one's exclusive use.

The Dining Car

Some trains do not have a dining car, meaning that passengers must leave the train when it stops and go to the station buffet for meals. This causes many obvious problems, not least of which is the prospect of being stranded in Bucharest because you were standing for too long in a queue for a sausage roll.

The dining car does not have a corridor – passengers walk between the tables to the end. It can only be entered from the other carriages and the kitchen, not from the platform.

There are places for fifty people to eat at once in the dining car. There are first and second sittings for both lunch and dinner. The waiters glide among the tables with sure steps, never stumbling, even when carrying full plates of soup.

The Menu

What is on the menu depends very much what sort of train it is. British trains have traditionally bad English food. Continental trains may offer delicious meals. On long journeys some dining cars will run out of certain items on the first day. Some menus may name something that is always unavailable. Peter Fleming, travelling on the Trans-Siberian railway in the 1930s, notes that the bottles of wine on the tables are merely there as decorations and never opened. On a long journey it may be effective to have the food deteriorate as time goes by – start with delicious four-course meals and end with only coffee and stale rolls being available. One thing is consistent: food on trains is over-priced.

The Kitchen

The kitchen is a hot and unpleasant place, with the cook and his assistants overworked and unhappy. Shouts can sometimes be heard coming from this area.

Here's a Menu adapted from the Orient Express of the 1880s, at which time it cost 10 francs to go across France from Paris to Nancy in Alsace.

Connections between Carriages

Before 1890 most trains had gaps between carriages that had to be stepped across. After 1890 the much safer 'vestibule connection', similar to that in a modern train, started to become the norm.

The Engine

The front of the engine, the engine proper, consists of a coal-fired boiler and a steam engine for providing power. On the outside are a number of funnels, whistles and a bell. All these and the engine itself are controlled by levers in the cab. There will be at least one member of the Black Gang (see below) in the cab at all times. Behind the cab is the coal truck; coal is shovelled through into the engine by the stoker.

Guard's Van

The Guard's Van is used for storage of luggage and mail, which is carried in sealed sacks. Occasionally, if the train is full, passengers are allowed to stand in the guard's van. On long journeys the guard and off-duty members of the Black Gang from the engine room sleep on the sacks.

Outside the Train

It is possible to climb out of the doors and windows of the compartment and make your way along the top of the carriages.

Lunch

4 francs (without wine)

Eggs or Fish
Hot meat and vegatables
Cold meats
Dessert

Dinner

6 francs (without wine)

Soup
Hors d'ouvre
Fish
Two plates of meat and vegetables
Dessert

Sundries

Bread	*0.15 centimes*	Cold meats	*1.50 francs*
Butter	*0.50 centimes*	Goose liver	*2.00 francs*
Eggs	*0.75 centimes*	Potatoes	*.75 centimes*
Beefsteak	*1.75 francs*	Vegetables	*1.00 franc*
Lamb cutlet	*1.75 francs*	Cheese	*.50 centimes*
Veal cutlet	*1.75 francs*	Coleslaw	*1.50 francs*

Wine

Between *1.75* and *12 francs* a bottle, depending on quality
Tea - or coffee *50 centimes* Beer *1.00 franc* Minerals *1.00 franc*

This is strictly forbidden by the Railway Company. If you do this you should be careful to hold on, and to watch out for low bridges and tunnels – you'll have to fling yourself flat against the roof to avoid them.

If anyone attempts to use a firearm from the top of a moving train the disorientating swaying of the carriages should be taken into account.

People

'The Black Gang'

The Black Gang are the men who keep the engine going, so called because they are always black with smoke and coal dust. In a game where the train regularly crosses international frontiers it can be a good idea to make the three men of different nationalities but still friends. They could also all be involved in some minor peccadillo or other, small-scale smuggling for instance.

Paul Critchley – Engine driver

Paul is a strong man who has always wanted to be an engine driver and has managed to work his way up to achieve his ambition. He resides in a cottage near the railway, and lives and dreams steam.

He will not risk his position under any circumstances and cannot be bribed, since nothing is more valuable to him than his job. His responsibility is to drive the train and get it there on time. He has a sense of humour and enjoys a drink when off duty. Very occasionally he turns up too drunk to drive, but Scotty and Dave cover for him.

Quote: "Maybe I shouldn't say it, but I love my engine more than anything."

'Scotty' Grant – Engineer

In the early days of steam, engineers all over the world were Scottish. Scotty is carrying on the great tradition, which he hopes will last well into the future. He is a thin, serious young man with carrot-red hair and a pasty complexion. He will ignore Paul's jokes. It is his job to keep the engine in-tune and running. On long journeys he alternates with Dave in the engine, but both lend a hand if they are needed. He will always be on hand with an explanation for any accident.

Quote: "We took the corner too fast. If we can get her up I think she'll run."

Dave Zimmerman – Fireman/Stoker

Dave is a strong, solid man, usually heavily covered with coal dust. He does a dirty but essential job. He looks after the engine by keeping up the fire and water levels. He obeys the instructions of Paul and Scotty. He is a bit in awe of Scotty but enjoys a joke with Paul. These three men have been together for a few years, work well together and are loyal to each other.

Quote: "I just shovel the coal. If you want to know about anything you'd better ask Scotty – I mean Mr Grant."

Mr Walsh – Station Master

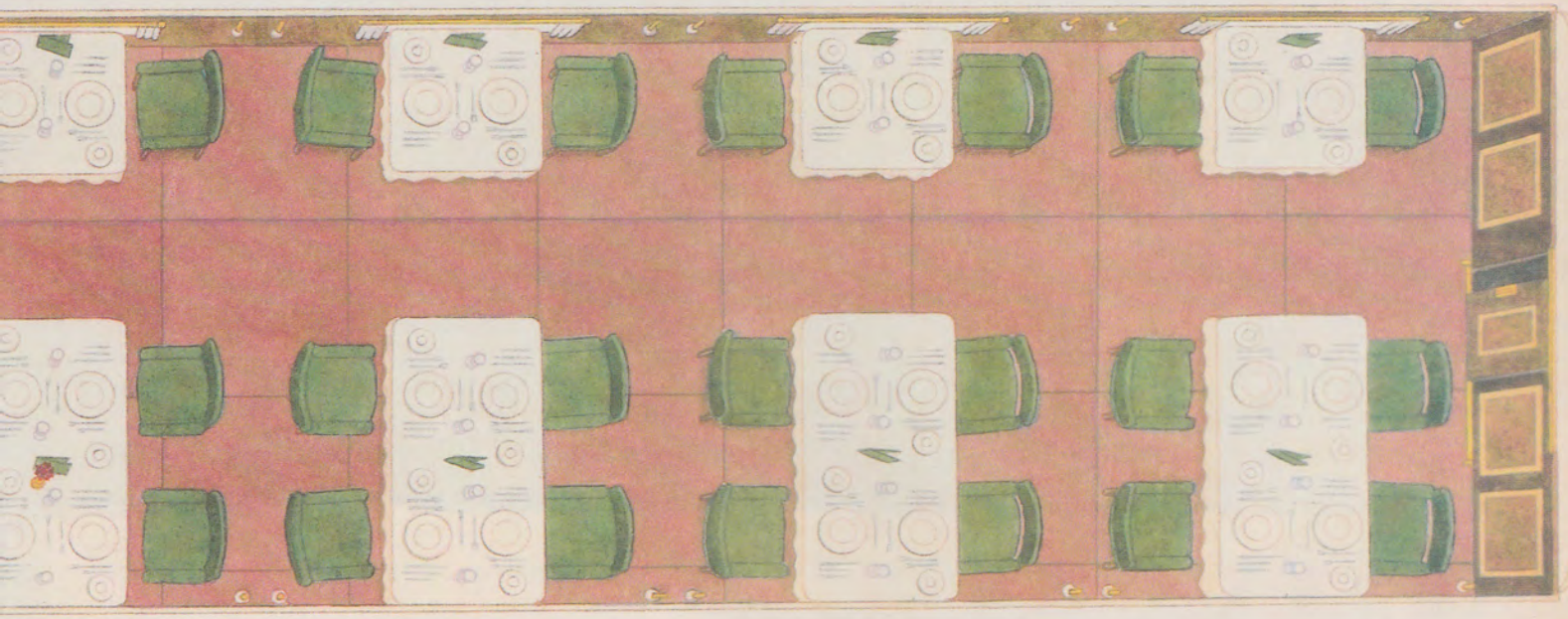
Mr Walsh rules his station with a firm hand. Trains arrive and depart precisely on time or he knows the reason why. He is a plump, officious man who will act obsequiously to passengers while bullying his staff. He wears his splendid uniform at all times. Nothing is ever his fault, in his opinion. He will always find someone else to take the blame. His station is immaculately kept, with no weeds in the hanging baskets and the timetable hung exactly straight. He keeps two copies of *Bradshaw* neatly placed in his office. He loudly berates the guards of trains that come in late, sometimes waking passengers in the sleepers in the middle of the night. Trains have been known to take risks by travelling too fast just to avoid being a few minutes late and enduring the wrath of Mr Walsh.

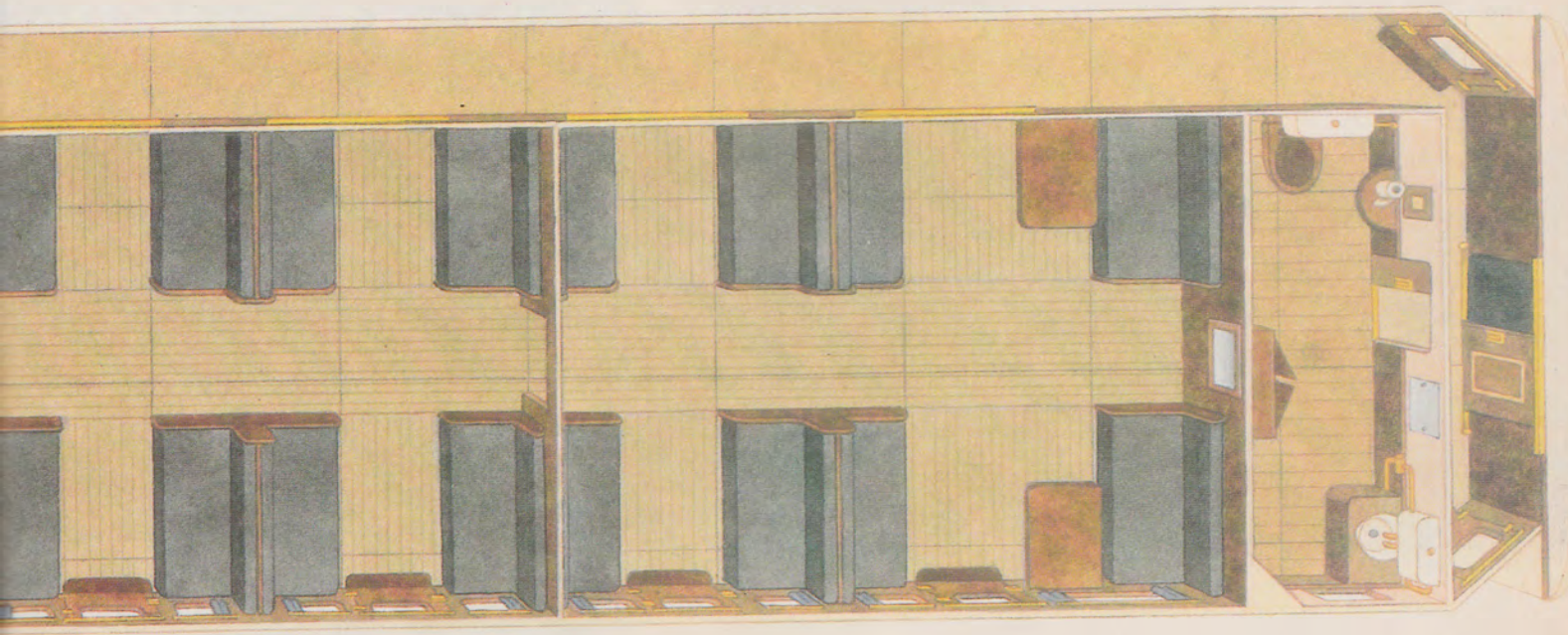
Quote: "Seven minutes late. Seven. I just can't understand it. There's absolutely no excuse for it, and I won't have it, do you hear?"

Andy Carter – Porter

Andy was invalided out of the army after he lost three fingers from his left hand. This doesn't stop him carrying luggage and wheeling trolleys. He has been a porter for ten years. He always presents his wounded hand when asking for tips, and will talk about his 'terrible wound' if Mr Walsh tries to blame him for anything. In fact it doesn't trouble him at all, and he plays it up for sympathy.

Quote: "Carry your bags, ma'am? Thank you kindly; a man needs a little extra when he has to live with a mutilation."





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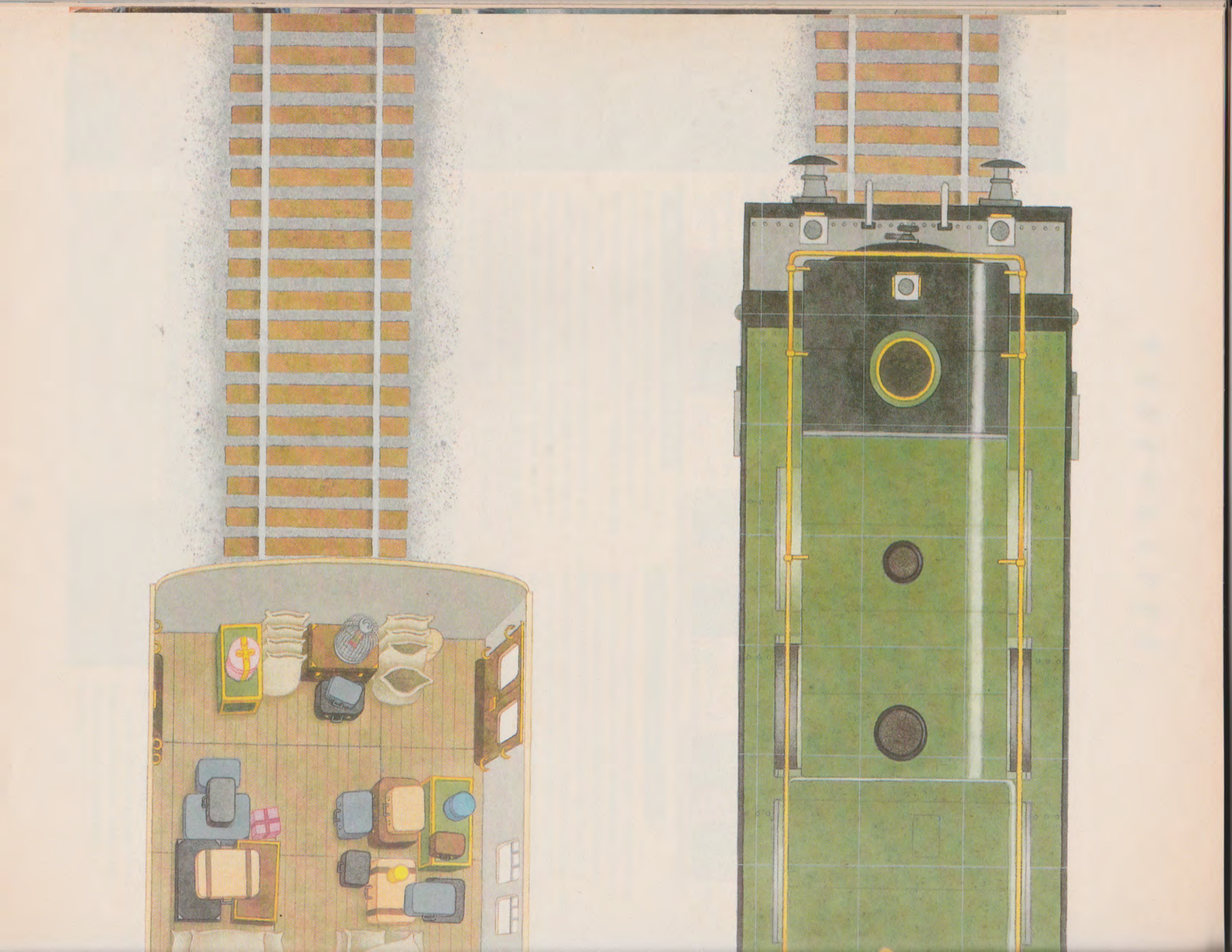

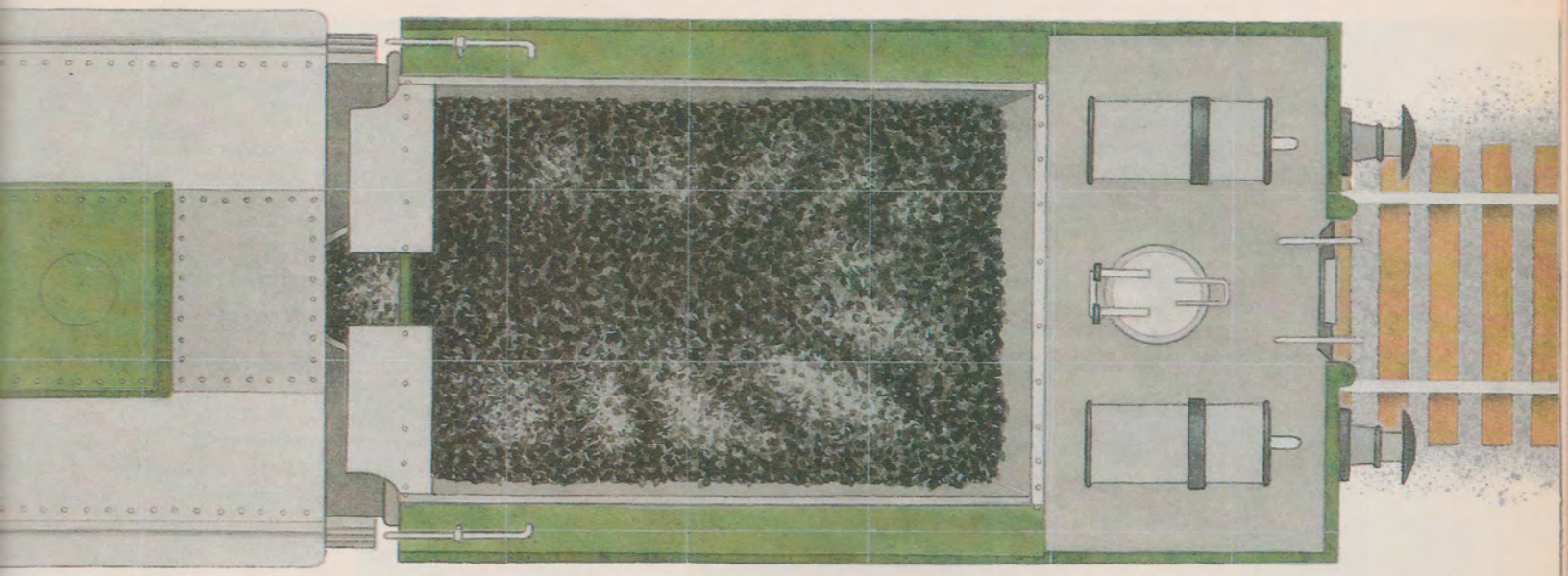

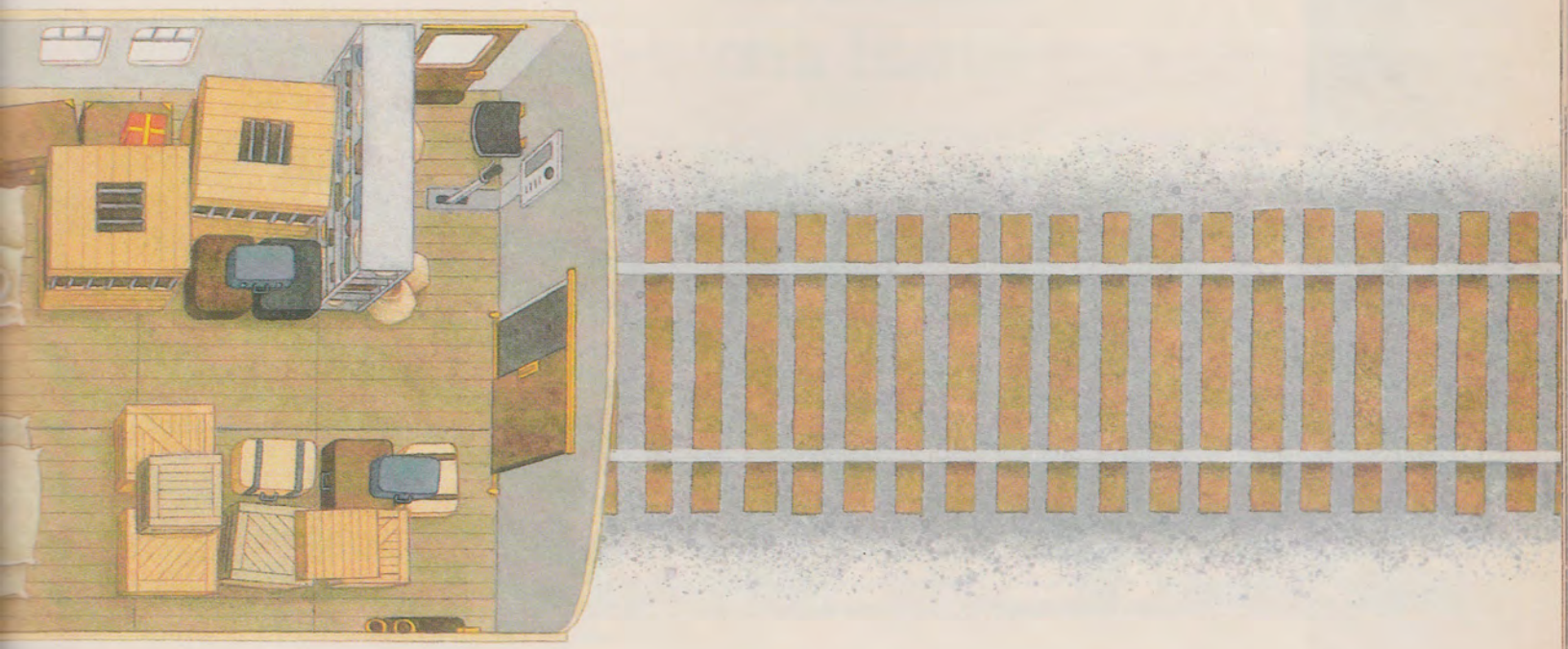

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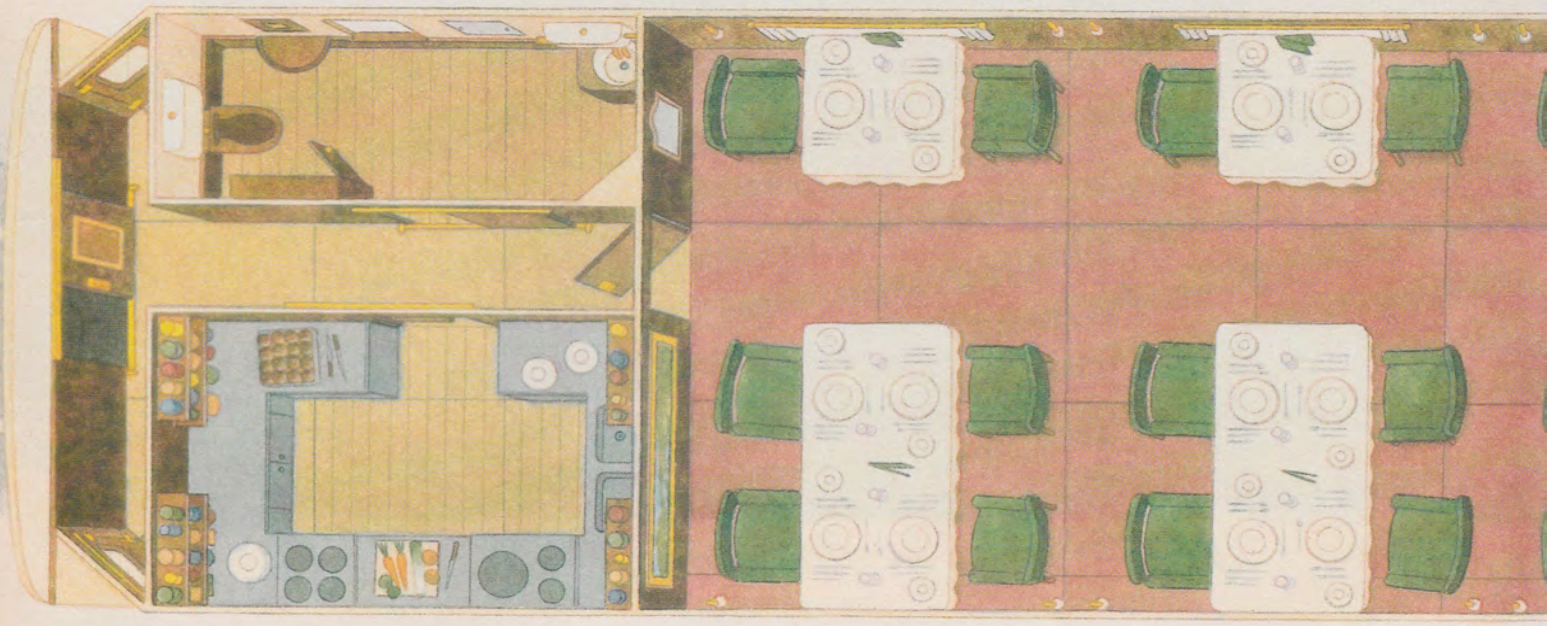
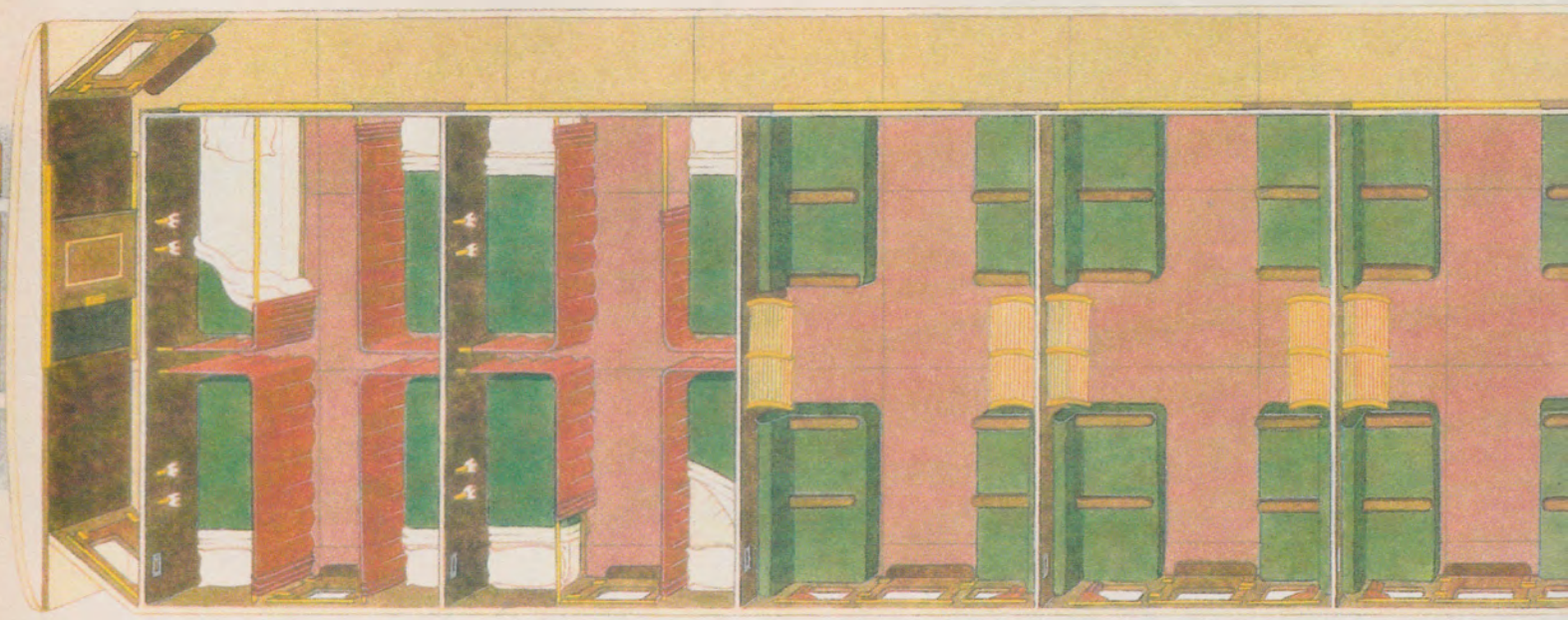




Marcel Leguine – Guard

Marcel is a Frenchman from Calais who has worked as a guard on trains all over the world. He has only recently joined this train. He is of small build with black hair and a small waxed black moustache. His eyes are keen and sharp. He speaks English with a strong French accent.

On some trains he may be entitled to issue tickets; on all trains he will check tickets, arrange sleeper reservations and tell people when the dining car is open. Marcel has an overbearingly charming manner, which repels many people. He bows over ladies' hands. He can quickly lose the charm if confronted with what he calls 'a stowaway', a passenger without a ticket. In a crisis he will tend to panic.

He is very reluctant to let anyone into his van without a good reason. The Black Gang are suspicious of him, as a Frenchman and a newcomer to the train, and suspect that he may reveal their secrets to Mr Walsh.

Quote: "You very lucky. I zink we have sleeper empty."

The Passengers

The passengers are here first described as they seem and then in terms of plot hooks. For a murder game it is a good idea to decide well in advance who is not what they seem and what their motive might be for committing a murder. Make sure it is not too easy to guess straight away, and decide who secretly knows each other. In a Cliffhangers game it might be amusing for once to make all the passengers (except Mrs F–S and the party) be spies of various nationalities who all know each other.

The Obnoxious Englishwoman: Mrs Faulteroy–Smythe and Cuthbert

Mrs Faulteroy–Smythe is a fussy rich widow. Cuthbert is her little Cairn terrier. As a dog he should travel in the guard's van, but Mrs F–S is capable of making so much fuss that she always manages to keep Cuthbert with her. They are both overfed and bad–tempered.

Mrs F–S is acts as a red herring in any plot. She always thinks the worst of everyone, never knows or sees anything of significance, and is no more nor less than what she seems. She always makes herself important and brings herself to the forefront, but she is nothing but background colour. Cuthbert has no abilities except for his loud, high–pitched bark. He cannot follow a scent or recognise people's natures – he just hates everyone.

Quote: "What are you doing to Cuthbert, you horrible little man?"

The Anonymous Englishman: Mr Brown

Mr Brown is an anonymous business traveller. He wears an inconspicuous suit and carries a briefcase. He may be a spy, or an assassin, or just a businessman. He is reserved and quiet. He is polite in all circumstances and follows the code of conduct of an English gentleman. If he is not what he seems then as a clue you might let the players see him kick Cuthbert.

Quote: "No, thank you."

The Newly–weds: Claude and Marianne Blythe

This young couple are on their honeymoon. They clearly love each other deeply and spend all their time holding hands. They are an attractive couple, with many bags. Marianne has blonde ringlets and Claude looks honest and straightforward. They should be English or American. They are friendly to everyone all the time. They are likely to overhear and see suspicious things. They may well have something to hide, and this should come out in questioning. It may be that they are smugglers, spies, or merely not actually married. This pair make good villains since they are so unlikely to be suspected.

Quote: "We only got married the day before yesterday!"

The Mysterious Adventuress: Irina Komisky

Irina is a beautiful woman from Eastern Europe. She wears furs and travels first–class, but her past is mysterious. She has dark hair and flashing eyes. She is in her early thirties, and her nationality is not easy to guess.

Irina can be used for anything. She can be a villain or a heroine. She may be a White Russian princess, or involved in some Balkan intrigue, or even a spy. She can be given an English name and passport if she has at some time been married to an Englishman. Whatever her true position, she will immediately appear mysterious and suspicious.

Quote: "I never think about the past."

Adventures on a Train

A train is a good place for encountering strangers, uncovering mysteries and being forced into involvement in an adventure. It is a microcosm – a world that can't be left while it is moving.

Railway Jargon

It isn't necessary to be a train spotter or to know everything about everything to make your railway seem authentic. You just need to drop in the right word at the right moment.

Here's how to bluff your way through running a train scenario. Carriages are coupled together, and to the engine. The stops at the end of platforms to catch the train are buffers. The difference between a broad–gauge and a narrow gauge line is how far apart the rails are. Broad–gauge is standard. Only British stations have high platforms. In other countries you climb up steps on the side of the carriage to get from rail level into the train. A *Bradshaw* is a timetable. From the Victorian period until the Second World War it was possible to use it to learn the times of trains all over the world.

The Unexpected Confrontation

The train is the perfect place for unexpected meetings. You may just be travelling somewhere in the Victorian period or the

1930s and the train is the ideal way to get there. Of course, your worst enemy wants to get there too. Naturally, sparks start to fly when you all meet in the dining car.

Murder on the Train

There is no better environment for running a murder mystery – the suspects are limited and the possibilities for observation of clues are unparalleled. Long journeys work best for this.

Have the party meet the victim and the suspects during their first day on the train. Make sure that they interact. You can involve them in the investigation in any number of ways. An amusing option is to have one of them find the body and immediately become the suspect, and have everyone work to clear the PC's name.

The Ghost Train

The Ghost Train is the train that isn't supposed to be there; the train that had something terrible happen to it a long time ago and which still haunts the rails that saw the disaster. Maybe the driver was drunk and the train went off the rails into a ravine, killing everyone.

Whatever you decide, the train should be looping through the events leading to its disaster, at first seemingly normally but growing progressively stranger. Like all ghosts, a ghost train needs to be laid to rest, most probably by completing its journey. This could climax with the PCs trying to bring the increasingly ghostly train into the station before dawn breaks. This works better as a creepy scenario rather than 'buckets of blood' style horror.

External Problems

The train is an environment with its own potential problems – attack by hostile natives, runaway engine, crash, someone tied on the line ahead. If you are running a train mystery this kind of thing can provide a sudden reminder of the outside world.

The Transdimensional Train

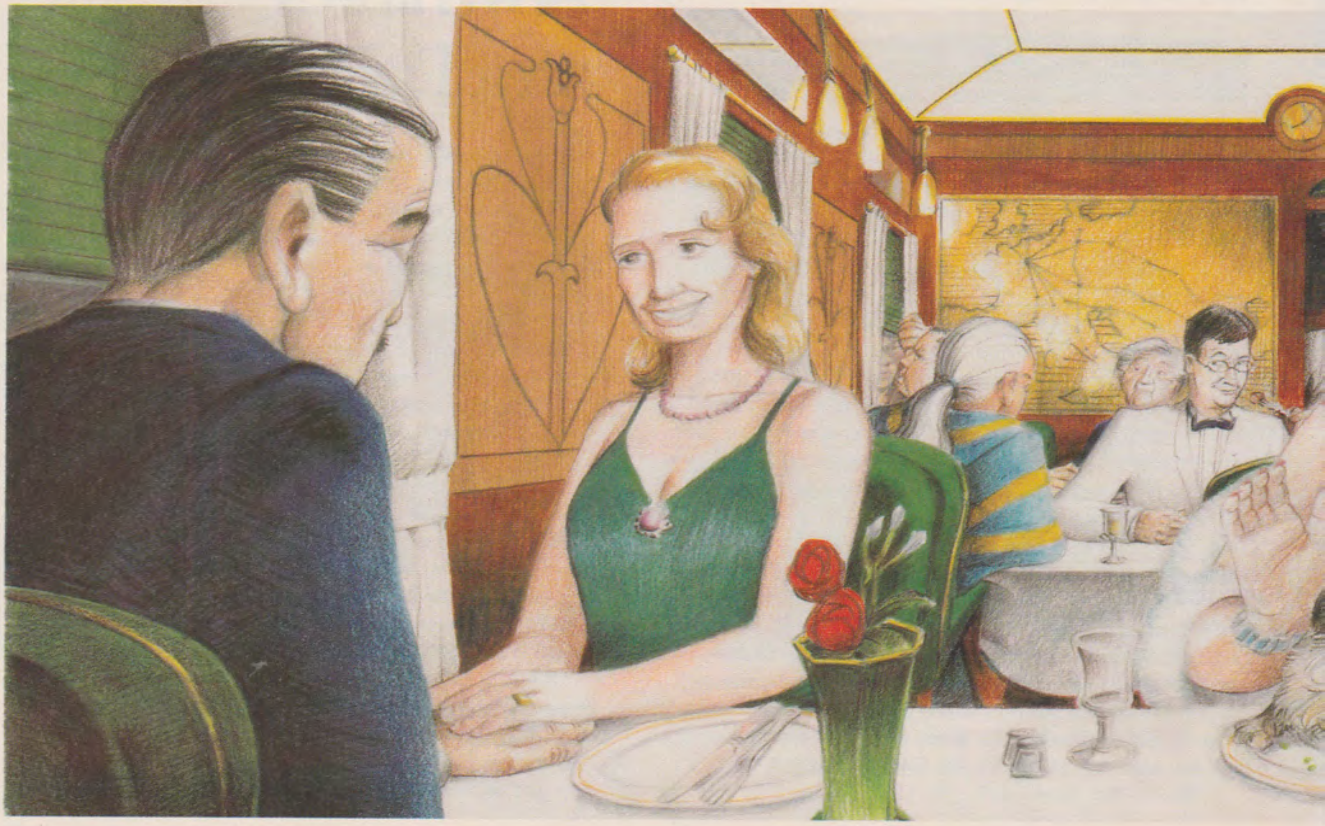
The local pulls into platform three – but the crest on the side looks subtly wrong. "By appointment to her Imperial Majesty Julie of Dalmatia?" This train is going down the track, but it's out of control. The rails seem to lead straight ahead, but who can tell where the next stop will be? This train is cursed, or blessed, with the ability to find its own way between alternate realities. These may be alternate versions of our history, or entirely different worlds. Any world which has stations may see the unexpected arrival of the Transdimensional Train, its crazy crew and peculiar passengers. There's no going back!

Using Railways in Your Campaign

Trains are inherently romantic: not just steam trains, even modern trains have a certain glamour. Use that glamour. Give your train a name: the Trans-Siberian Express, the Orient Express, the Trans-Pennine Mail. Evoke the spirit of the age before cars and planes made travel streamlined.

Magic Trains

In a fantasy world steam trains are less likely to spoil the atmosphere than any other form of rapid transportation. They



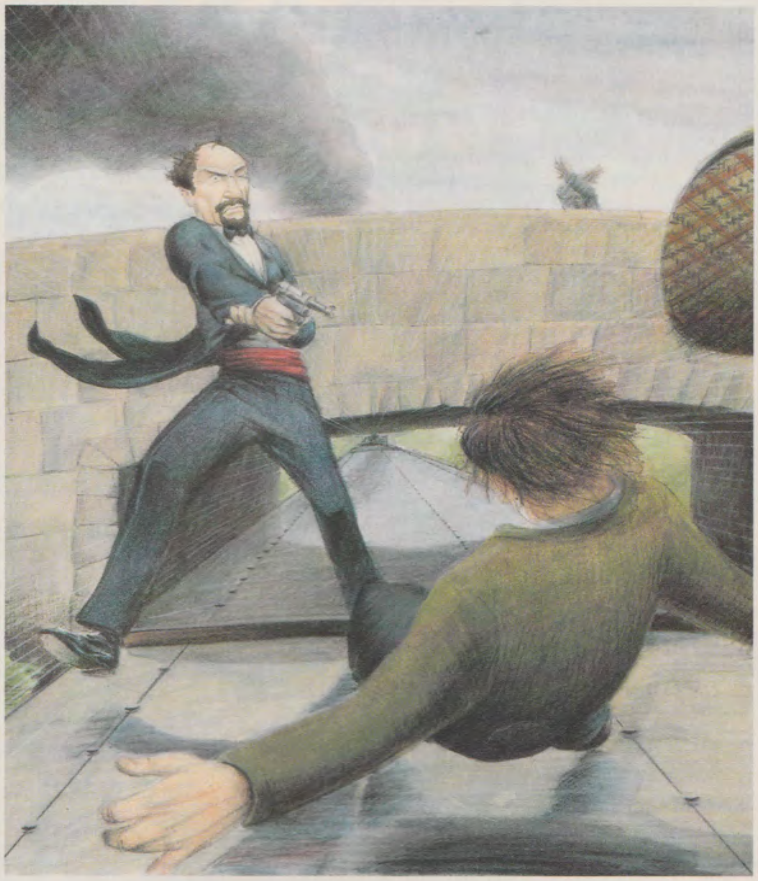
are achievable at fairly low levels of technology – the most difficult thing is building a boiler that will not burst. With judicious use of magic to create the steam pressure and a wizard instead of an engineer, it can be full steam ahead. Build a railway across your favourite fantasy world to connect up the cities or penetrate the wilderness. Or have an evil empire buying up land and building railways across it for its own nefarious purposes.

The Age of Steam

When trains were new and companies were competing with each other to get lines to the cities, it was an exciting time to be involved in the railways. There was a cut-throat atmosphere and much double dealing. Railway companies are a must for any Victorian game.

Suggestions for Further Reading

There are some wonderful books about trains available. Particularly good for pictures are *The Golden Age of Trains, 1830–1920*, published by Hamlyn, and *The Belle Epoque of the Orient Express* by M Wiesenthal. Novels that provide particularly useful train ideas for adaption to roleplaying games include Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*, Graham Greene's *Stamboul Train*, Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*, which is chock full of train adventures, and, for modern adventures on a train, Lisa St Aubin de Teran's *Slow Train to Milan*. If you are running a game in a specific period and want details it is always worth seeking out period travel books, for example Peter (brother of the more famous Ian) Fleming's *Travels in Tartary* and also period *Bradshaws*. There is an excellent board game called *Railway Rivals* about the period of building railways. There are also some computer games based on the subject: *Railroad Tycoon* is fun.



Next month

Let loose the arrows into the skies and hear the injured roar. Let the trumpets blare, and unfurl the pennants that they might flutter and flap in the sweet wind of chivalry. As someone once said. Sort of. In next month's encounter we'll be visiting the romantic and chivalrous Keep, where the peasantry gape and gasp as noble knights meet in combat to win the favours of ladies fair, and where more modern adventurers will no doubt find the odd unquiet spirit that needs laying to rest...

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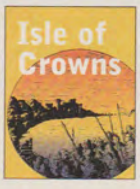

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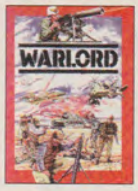

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The Month In Games

The best collection of games we've seen? Probably...

AND THAT'S NO LIE. What with *Vampire: The Dark Ages, Heresy, California Free State* and the second editions of *Mage* and *Don't Look Back,* we reckon that things have never looked better. No matter what game you're playing at the moment, we seriously recommend that you raid the piggy bank and buy at least one of these superb new games – and get stuck in.

Our policy is to review honestly, fairly and incisively all the major roleplaying, CCG and related game releases. If it's praised in **arcane** you know you can buy it with confidence; if we slate it, well... it's your money.

All our reviews are by experienced gamers and independent, professional journalists; people who play the games you do. This is *the* place for definitive reviews of games and expansions.

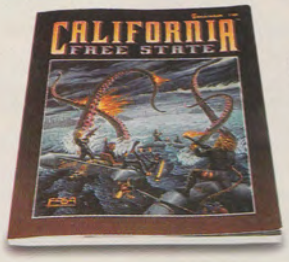
(And while you're here, a note about prices. A lot of stuff reviewed in **arcane** is imported from the USA by a number of different distributors, so the prices we've given must be viewed as guidelines only. Fluctuating exchange rates or something...)

Pick of the month

"Emphasises personality over numbers"

Vampire: The Dark Ages

Page 56



"Packed with ideas, inspiration and plot hooks"

California Free State

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The Icons

Each review in **arcane** is identified with a rather nifty icon showing what kind of game it is. Here's what they mean:

Roleplaying systems

Collectable card games and expansions

Board games, miniature systems

Dice games and expansions

Computer games and utilities

Books and supplements

The Scores

Everything reviewed in **arcane** gets a mark out of 10. Here's a guide to what the individual marks represent...

Score 10/10 Perfect. There's simply nothing better.

Score 9/10 Excellent; a classic. Highly recommended.

Score 8/10 Very good, with few problems. Recommended.

Score 7/10 Good, but not exceptional.

Score 6/10 Above average, but not without problems.

Score 5/10 Average, or a mixture of good and bad.

Score 4/10 Below average, but not without merit.

Score 3/10 Poor, crucially flawed in some way.

Score 2/10 Very poor; should be avoided.

Score 1/10 Appallingly bad, no redeeming features at all.

arcane seal of approval

Each month we fight and argue among ourselves to select that one extra-special product most deserving of your money and the coveted **arcane** accolade.

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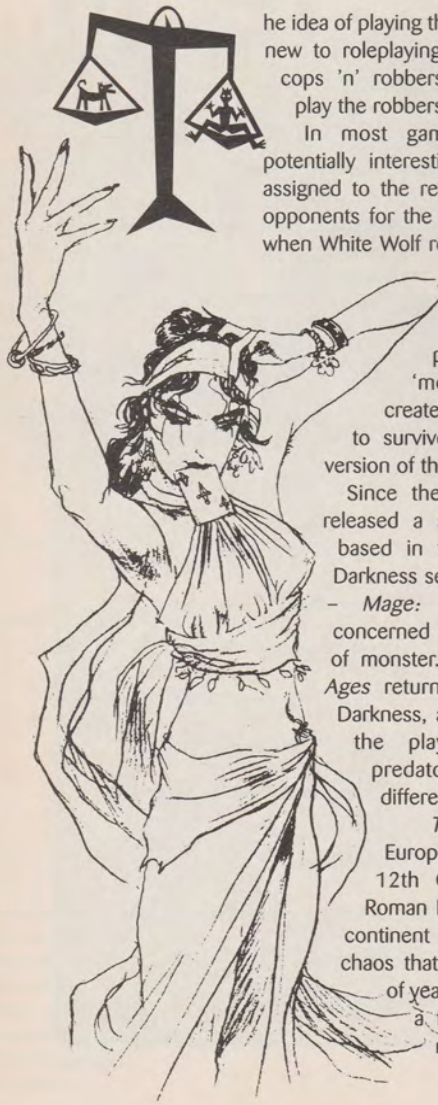
A roleplaying game Vampire: The

White Wolf Games 001 404 292 1819 £16.99 Out now

Before the rise of science, when only candles held back the night, vampires must have had it easy. Or did they?



The idea of playing the 'bad guys' is hardly new to roleplaying – after all, even in cops 'n' robbers, somebody had to play the robbers.

In most games, though, these potentially interesting roles have been assigned to the referee, to be used as opponents for the players to defeat. So when White Wolf released *Vampire: The Masquerade* it was virtually unique in casting the players as the 'monsters' – newly created vampires struggling to survive in a darkly gothic version of the modern world.

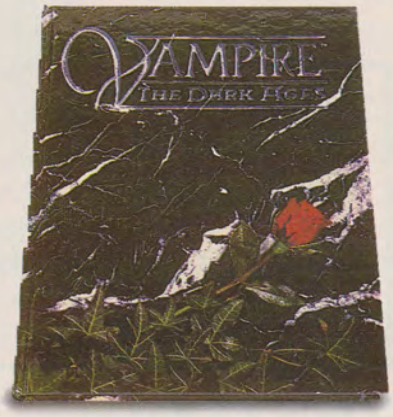
Since then White Wolf have released a series of games, all based in the same World Of Darkness setting, and all but one – *Mage: The Ascension* – concerned with a different form of monster. *Vampire: The Dark Ages* returns to the World Of Darkness, and once more casts the players as nocturnal predators. What makes it different is the date.

The Dark Ages is set in Europe at the end of the 12th Century. When the Roman Empire fell the whole continent was plunged into a chaos that lasted for hundreds of years. Gradually, though, a form of stability has returned. It's a time that offers great opportunities for vampires – but also great dangers.

The nature of the beast

As you might expect, *Vampire: The Dark Ages* bears many similarities to *Vampire: The Masquerade,* not the least of which is the layout of the rules, which are here once again divided into three 'books' and nine chapters.

The first book, Background, is just that. It begins with the obligatory – although quite well done – introduction to roleplaying games, then outlines the World Of Darkness version of the 12th Century, dealing with both mortal and immortal society. Finally, it describes the various Clans.



In the World Of Darkness setting, all vampires believe themselves to be descendants of Caine, the first murderer who God cursed to walk the Earth forever with the mark of His wrath upon him.

However, not all vampires are the same. Over the ages specific 'bloodlines' have sprung up, each with different innate powers, outlooks and weaknesses. For example, the Gangrel turn away from civilisation and live in the wilderness, while the Lasombra believe themselves to be the superior to all other Clans, and are consumed by a lust for power.

At the time of *The Dark Ages* there are 13 of these Clans from which players can choose. The chapter describes each Clan, its history, organisation, attitudes, relationships with other clans and so on.

"The system's at once both simple and elegant, allowing for different degrees of success and failure with a single roll"

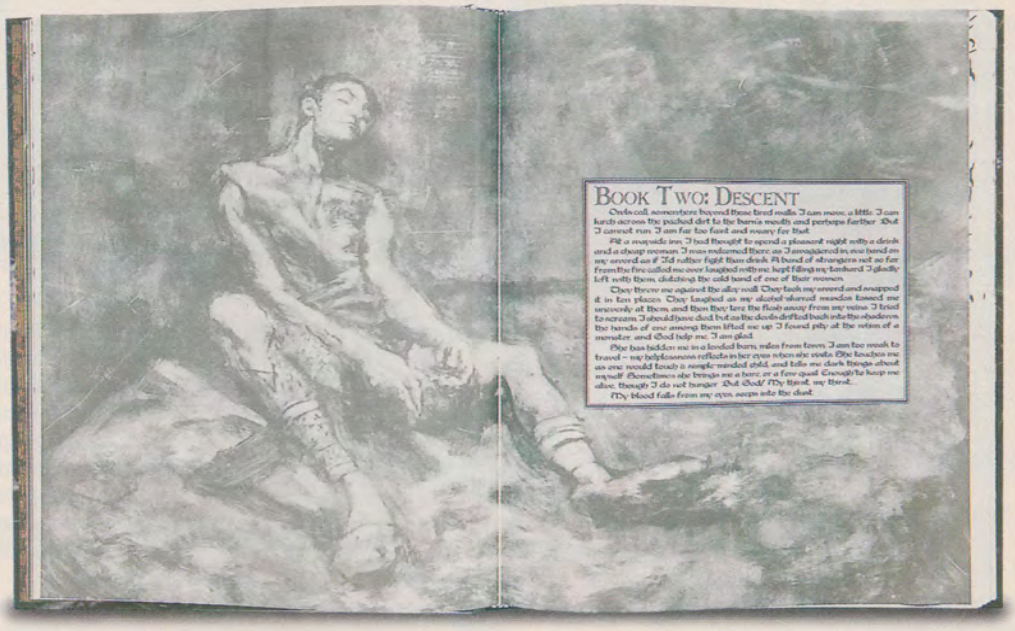
The second book, Becoming, deals with the nuts and bolts of the rules. *Vampire: The Dark Ages* uses the same basic system as all the World Of Darkness games. All characters are rated in nine Attributes and variety of Abilities (skills), both of which normally range from 1 to 5. To succeed at a specific task, the player rolls a number of ten-sided dice equal to

Dark Ages

the sum of a relevant Attribute and an Ability, and every dice which exceeds the Difficulty of the task is counted as a success. It's at once both simple and elegant, allowing for different degrees of success or failure with a single roll.

In keeping with the nature of system, character creation is also simple, and places an emphasis on personality over numbers. Players first decide on a general concept, Clan and basic personality traits. The different categories of Attributes and Abilities are then prioritised, and points assigned to them. Disciplines (the supernatural powers of the vampire, which vary from Clan to Clan), Backgrounds (specific advantages such as wealth or loyal retainers), and Virtues (broad definitions of the character's mental and spiritual makeup) are next. Finally there are a couple of calculations, and the character is done.

The last book, Permutations, is largely aimed at referees, and includes various systems for dealing with specific situations such as combat, a discussion of storytelling, and a description of the various groups and individuals that the vampires will probably find themselves pitted against.



Although not every piece of artwork in the book is superb, nearly all of them help create the moody atmosphere that's one of *Vampire: The Dark Ages'* greatest achievements. Even the fonts have been carefully chosen.

In many ways, *Vampire: The Dark Ages* is attempting to serve a dual purpose. On the one hand it's a stand- →

Vampire: The Dark Ages is the first release in a new range of 'historical' stand-alone games from White Wolf. Next up is *Werewolf: The Wild West*, which details the struggle between the Native American Garou tribes and the European 'invaders'. Look out for more news in coming issues of **arcane**.

Quite possibly one of White Wolf's best ideas, the referee's section demonstrates a section of play using this 'graphic novel' format. The page on the left tells the story, while the page on the right steps through the same scene in game terms.

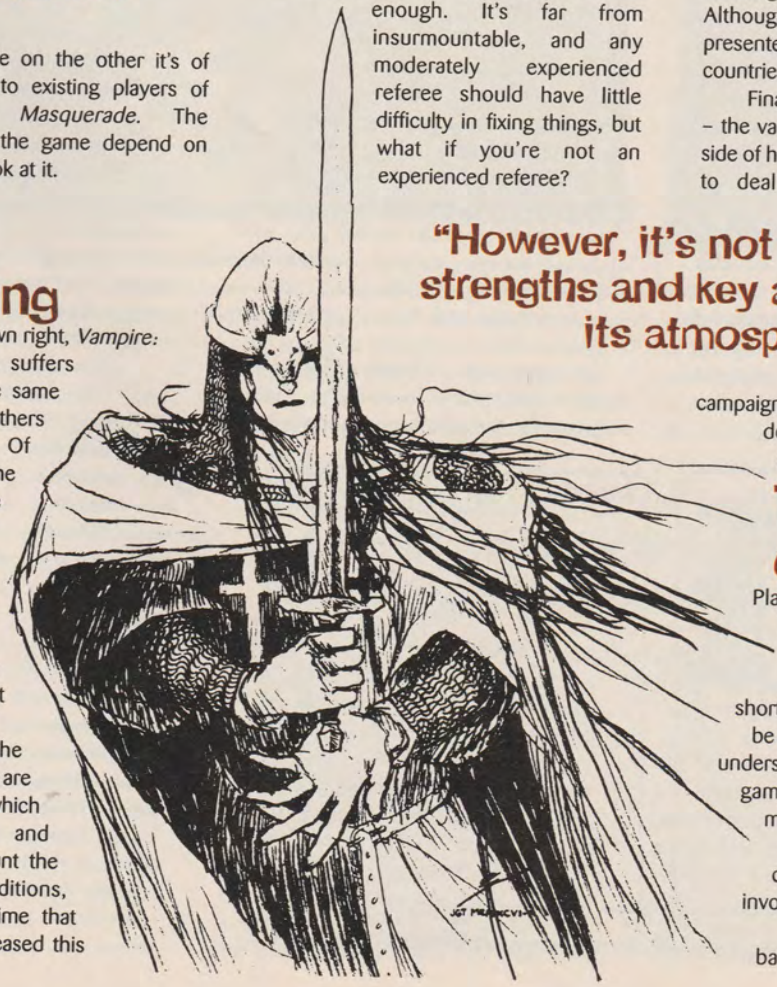
alone game, while on the other it's of obvious interest to existing players of *Vampire: The Masquerade.* The shortcomings of the game depend on which way you look at it.

A new beginning

As a game in its own right, *Vampire: The Dark Ages* suffers from many of the same problems as the others in the World Of Darkness series. The first lies in the mechanics themselves. Although the system itself is a breeze, and very easy to get to grips with, it's not without its idiosyncrasies.

Perhaps the most disappointing are the combat rules, which are confused and unclear. If you count the various second editions, this is the ninth time that White Wolf has released this set of rules, and every time this problem has reared its ugly head. It has to be said that some work has been done, but not enough. It's far from insurmountable, and any moderately experienced referee should have little difficulty in fixing things, but what if you're not an experienced referee?

Technically speaking, 1197 falls somewhat after the historical Dark Ages. But you have to admit, *Vampire: The Dark Ages* sounds a lot cooler than *Vampire: Towards The End of The High Middle Ages.*



"However, it's not without great strengths and key among them is its atmosphere"

Which leads to the biggest potential drawback to *Vampire: The Dark Ages* – this is not a game for beginners. For a start, although the layout of the book is an improvement on *Vampire: The Masquerade,* it still leaves something to be desired. Different rules and terms are defined at different points, making it potentially confusing.

For example, the book never clearly explains the basic nature of vampires in the game. Given that every book and film to feature vampires has dealt with them differently, and often ascribed them different powers, you'd have thought that it would make sense for the rules to begin with a description of what this version is like. No such luck. Instead, you have to piece it together from the rules given, and you're still left with several questions.

Likewise, the setting itself is only described in the broadest terms. Unless you happen to be an expert on the 12th Century, in order to run a game of *Vampire: The Dark Ages* you're going to have to put a fair amount of work into fleshing out the basics given here. Although the basic setting is clearly presented, detail about the politics and countries would have been very useful.

Finally, the subject of the game itself – the vampire, and through it the darker side of human nature – is not an easy one to deal with. Running an effective campaign will take a lot of work and dedication, from players and referee alike.

The war of Ages

Players of *Vampire: The Masquerade,* of course, will have a lot less problems to deal with. None of the shortcomings in the mechanics will be new, you'll already have a good understanding of the nature of the game's vampires, and perhaps most importantly of all, you'll already have experience of creating and playing stories involving them.

However, the lack of enough background information still

raises its ugly head. What makes *Vampire: The Dark Ages* different from *The Masquerade* is its setting, and although there is a lot of information included, a lot of work will still have to be done to actually play the game.

Given that a great deal of the information included here – the extra clans, their Disciplines, the system of Merits and Flaws, and the concept of the Road (or Path) – has already been covered in various supplements, you may well already have it. What you're effectively buying the game for is the history of the Clans before the formation of the Camarilla and the Sabat, and it would have been good to see this side of things covered in slightly more detail.

The last embrace

Vampire: The Dark Ages, then, is not without problems, many of which stem from its attempt to be two things at once – both a new game and an expansion for *Vampire: The Masquerade.* However, it's also not without great strengths, and key amongst them is its atmosphere.

Of course, the very form of the main protagonists helps. Vampires are amongst the most fascinating of monsters, perhaps because their once-human natures allow us to empathise with them more easily than with many creatures. However, while they certainly give the atmopshere a kick-start, the fanged ones alone aren't always enough; just think of all the appaling vampire movies you've ever seen.

What makes *The Dark Ages* so effective, then, is the interaction between the the vampires and the setting. Where *The Masquerade* played on the contrast between these ancient creatures and the modern world, The mediaeval setting of *The Dark Ages* is used to compliment the characters that the game portrays.

The grim realities of the mediaeval world are, in many ways, the perfect backdrop for these nocturnal predators. In this age before science and reason, when only candles and torches held the shadows of night at bay, the vampire was truly a horrific figure, and held great power.

The flip side to this coin, though, is that this is an age where people *know* that the vampire exists, and have greater faith in the powers of the Church. The cities, the vampire's natural habitat, are smaller, so the activities of the vampire are more easily noticed. There are no phones, faxes, computers or 24 hour stores, and if a vampire wishes to deal with a mortal, they must do so face to face.

Vampire: The Dark Ages does an admirable job of both capturing this atmosphere and presenting it in a way which provides nearly endless possibilities for gaming. Everything from brutal struggles for survival to political intrigue is possible. Whether you're new to the White Wolf games or an experienced hand, there's enough potential here for years of gaming.

Like its predecessor, *Vampire: The Dark Ages* is not an easy game to play, but it is a great one.

Andy Butcher

Score 8/10

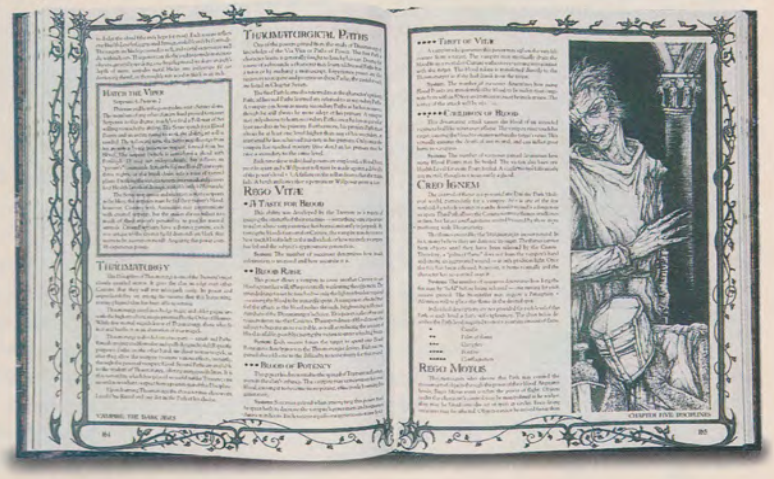
And the players said...

BEN: "This game oozes atmosphere from every pore."

STEVE: "The dark ages are the perfect setting for *Vampire.* I loved it."

JAMES: "If you've ever wanted to play a Tzimisce warlord, this is definitely for you."

ADAM: "It's certainly interesting, but I prefer the modern setting of *The Masquerade.*"



Things that go bump in the night

Of course, vampires are not the only supernatural beings stalking the world of The Dark Ages. All the beings described in White Wolf's other World Of Darkness games – werewolves, magi, wraiths and changelings – are also present in this brooding mediaeval setting. As well as detailing these creatures in game terms, the Antagonists chapter of *Vampire: The Dark Ages* details something of their history and offers suggestions for referees who own the games and are interested in running a cross-over campaign.

Unfortunately for fans of five hundred pound eco-warriors with fangs, *The Dark Ages* is a less than ideal setting for werewolves. The prophecies of the Apocalypse are hardly credited, the natural world has yet to be badly damaged by humanity, wolf Kinfolk are common, and servants of the Wyrm are almost always obvious as such. While these factors make Garou less interesting characters to play, though, they do mean that werewolves are more powerful foes for vampires.

Likewise, changelings offer several problems as characters, being far more powerful in this Age. Faeries do offer some intriguing possibilities as non-player characters, but introducing them into the Dark Ages could quickly ruin the atmosphere of the game.

Wraiths, however, offer many possibilities – and there are many ways in which vampires can come into contact with the spirits of the dead. Although the politics and structure of Shadowlands are quite different and many of the Arcanoi either have no mediaeval equivalent or will require significant changes, the setting has a great deal to offer players of *Wraith: The Oblivion.*

Perhaps the best candidates are magi. Although few of the Traditions are active and the Technocracy has yet to be formed, *Vampire: The Dark Ages* is set at a time when the Order Of Hermes has yet to realise the true nature of the change in its allies, the Ventrue. There's a lot of potential in this situation, either for groups of magi or a mixture of mage and vampire characters.

Vampire is a word that occurs in French, German, English and all Slavic languages. It first appeared in the Dark Ages, and nobody knows where it came from.

A modern-day horror roleplaying system

Don't Look Back:

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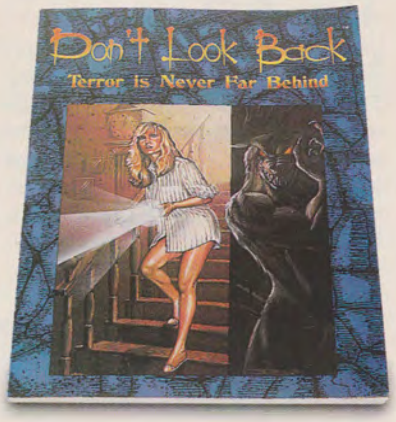
could this be the *x-files*-style RPG we've all been waiting for?



Reality is an illusion – a pretty convincing one, sure, but it's only convincing because The Powers That Be decree that it should be so. Governments are blissfully unaware that they're being manipulated, and that their power is no more real than the reality they subscribe to. Paranoid? Maybe you should be...

Welcome to the sublime world of *Don't Look Back*. There is no escape: you're here now, and all you can do is trust your sanity to last the ride. And boy is it going to be a rough one. All those things that your parents told you aren't true – the bogeyman, the people with pigs' faces, brutal killers and the things that go bump in the night – they're real alright, and they're on your case.

Or rather, as a player in this second edition of Mind Ventures' chilling modern-day horror/conspiracy system, the roles are reversed and you're on the case of these defilers of nature. You take the part of a college student with an unhealthy thirst for esoteric knowledge, a reporter for an occult magazine, a clergyman who's on a crusade against hidden evils or a government operative working on the fringes of the law, endlessly searching for answers which will always evade you.

"There is no escape: you're here now, and all you can do is trust your sanity to last"

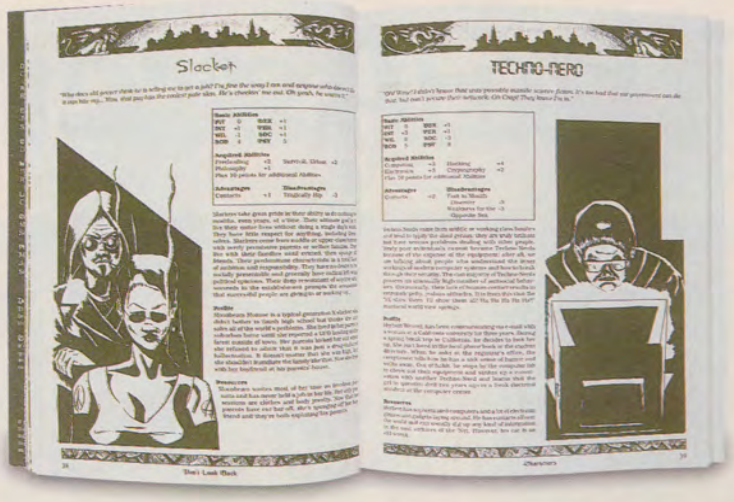
The real-world setting of this novel game makes the subject matter – hidden horrors, alien abductions and secret societies – all the more disquieting but, by the same token, that much more believable. If the referee runs it seriously, this could be one of the most disturbing roleplaying experiences his players are likely to come across. Want to recreate the grim surrealities of the recent smash film *Se7en*? Go ahead – make your players' nightmare...

After running the longer of the two sample scenarios at the back of the 200-plus-page rulebook and the (slightly less serious) scenarios in the *Giant Psychic Insects from Outer Space* supplement (reviewed on page 69), I feel that it's as an *X-Files*-style game that *Don't Look Back*

Get stuck right in

There are two fairly short sample scenarios that fill the last 20 pages of the *Don't Look Back* rulebook. The first, *The House on Dolly Hill*, is designed to introduce both novice referees and novice players to the game. To this end it works well, although it's not that inspired and you can't help but think that, even though it does a good job of helping the players get used to the rules, it's not generally reflective of the 'feel' of the game as a whole. It concerns the haunting of an old house on a hill, a house which is stumbled upon by a group of students (the PCs), and the events that occur thereafter.

Far better is the second scenario, *The Facade*, which has the PCs playing the role of Federal agents in a newly created subdivision of the FBI whose job it is to look into occultist activity (concern that the Waco incident was just the beginning has got the US Justice Department more than a little nervous). The PCs hear of what looks like a major cover-up – a woman is found dead, with puncture marks at the side of her throat, her body completely drained of blood. Weeks later, following the post mortem, her cause of death is stated to be a gun-shot wound to her chest, and, somewhat surprisingly, she's now got her full quota of the old red stuff. When the PCs discover that this is not the first young woman to wind up in similar circumstances, they start to get very suspicious indeed...



There are few changes between this, the second edition, and the first edition rules. Notable differences include penalties for bad roleplaying (Bad Karma points that the referee can use against the PC) and revised rules for handling situations where a character tries to perform a number of actions at once.

works best. Lightening the tone to that of the *X-Files* helps to make the game more fun than running it as attempt to scare your players half to death. Sure, some teams may thrive upon the recreation of extreme fear but, given the tone of the rules, I don't think this is the intention of the game's designers.

The *X-Files* precepts translate perfectly into *Don't Look Back* campaigns: having the player characters adopt the roles of Federal agents gives the referee (or Guide, as he is called within this rules set) a reason to place the PCs in the areas where his adventures are set. It's normally difficult (as referees of *Call of Cthulhu* campaigns have no doubt discovered) to come up with adequate justification for involvement on the part of PCs, but this is not the case if the PCs are working for an agency who's very job is to get to the bottom of things when all is not well. The 'interested student' and the 'debutante with nothing better to do' character types just don't wash in games such as this.

So, you're now more or less aware of what *Don't Look Back* is about. I've been deliberately vague because to reveal the specifics would be to destroy a great deal of the excitement for potential and existing players of the game – trust me, there's stuff going on that you don't even want to think about at this stage. But how about those rules? The things which hold this masterpiece of implicit horror together?

This is a rules set that hangs together extremely well, in a minimalist kind of way. The system itself is fairly simple – it's based on skills and tests being pitted against a suitable characteristic using the best or worst three scores rolled on a varying number six-sided dice.

The system works well – it's fast (especially the character generation system, which assumes that if you're of a certain profession you're going to have a certain number of fixed basic skills, and which concentrates more on making your character an individual by attributing a background and some specific advantages and disadvantages), and that's what counts in my book, because the faster the system the more time you can spend on playing through the scenarios.

It has to be said, though, that *Don't Look Back* relies quite heavily on the judgement of the referee, and it offers little guidance in this regard. Although it would be an ideal game for beginning players, it might be tough going for inexperienced referees.

As you may have gathered by now, I think *Don't Look Back* is a superb RPG. The subject matter offers flexibility in terms of gaming style (ranging from dark and brooding through vaguely sinister to downright farcical), and the implementation of the system is a breeze.

When you read through the rules you have trouble controlling the streams of scenario ideas that come flooding through, and that, if anything, is an indication that this is a game with staying power and lasting interest for both players and referee. I shall, without doubt, be playing this one a great deal.

One of the few things that isn't great about *Don't Look Back* is the quality of the illustrations. Other than a few fine drawings, the standard would make A-level art students cringe.

As you can see, the illustrations are not very good, but luckily they don't ruin the atmosphere of this otherwise fine game.

And the players said...

FIONA "It took a while to work out what was going on, but once I did it became a must-play – very atmospheric!"

DAVE "I was expecting a full-on horror game, something akin to *Call of Cthulhu*, but it's more subtle than that. Excellent stuff."

LESLEY "I prefer fantasy settings, but there was more than enough here to fire-up the imagination."

Paul Pettengale

Score 8/10

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A roleplaying game | £16.99 | White Wolf | 001 404 2921819 | Out now

Reality isn't what it seems. Few see the truth and can manipulate the world. They are the Mages, and they stride the Earth. Carefully.

Mage is the middle game in White Wolf's Storyteller system. The others are *Vampire: The Masquerade, Werewolf: The Apocalypse, Wraith: The Oblivion* and *Changeling: The Dreaming*. We are still awaiting *Mermaid: The Dehydration*.

We've all wanted to do it at one time or another. We've all dreamed of bending reality to our will, from wishing time would move faster, to making something (or someone) that gets in your way disappear. Of course, it never happens.

But just imagine that one day it did. Imagine that one day you discovered that reality is not the immutable, static thing you thought it to be, but something that is subject to your will. You would be awakened to a whole new way of living. This is the life of a Mage.

Players take the role of Mages, practitioners of magick that can shape reality. All around them the Ascension War, a struggle between four factions to define and control reality to their own ends, is raging. The players are members of one of the ten traditions, orders of mages that fight to restore a magickal high age that was lost many centuries ago. Arrayed against them are the forces of the Technocracy, the Marauders and the Nephandi.

Members of the Technocracy seek to bring a magick-free reality to the world, replacing it with a structure based on logic, order and reason. They're dull, but very, very deadly. The Mauraders seek only chaos and eternal change. They're mad, but very, very deadly. The Nephandi seek death, destruction and a final oblivion for the Earth. They're corrupt and very... oh, I'm sure you get the idea.

Just to make the Mages' lives even more entertaining, their main ability isn't easy to wield. You see, the Technocracy has been winning the Ascension War for centuries, and people, on the whole, don't believe in magick. So if mankind's collective unconscious catches anyone doing magick, it gets a bit miffed and slaps the culprit back into place with a force called Paradox. The consequences of Paradox can take the form of anything from a minor physical change in the mage's body to his exile in a little dimension all of his own for a while, giving him time to think things over.

To avoid this, most magick must appear coincidental: when you cast a

"It emphasises roleplaying and original solutions over silly spells."

on 2nd Edition

The rules themselves take second place to a wealth of background detail adorned with sumptuous artwork. Players of other Storyteller games should find plenty of relevant information here, too.

spell you have to come up with a coincidence to explain why it wasn't really magick at all, honest, guv. For example, if a mage should wish to strike an attacking, knife-wielding thug with, say, lightning, he might suddenly notice that the thug's previous knife lunge had slashed through an electrical cable connected to a nearby lamp, and... oh, dear. It's shocking when that happens.

The background and concepts in *Mage: The Ascension* are vast in scope, and they can be bewildering for the player who is new to the game. Yet for the novice gamer the system itself is wonderfully simple. Tasks are resolved by rolling a number of D10s equal to the sum of your character's attribute and skill. The results are measured against a difficulty number determined by the Storyteller (referee). How well you do is determined by the number of successes you get. For the experienced gamer who is used to making single rolls, it's a bit of a bugger to get your head round.

Pretty much the same feeling applies when reading the rulebook. You'd expect an introduction, followed by character generation and the rules, right? No. What you get is background, background and background. And just when you think there can't be any more to say, there's some more background. Oh, and then a few rules are squeezed in at the back.

That's the nature of this game, though: it emphasises roleplaying and original solutions over silly spells and fantastic powers. It's true that a sufficiently powerful mage can create a nuclear explosion in a tea cup with a snap of his fingers, but hey, try and come up with a coincidence to explain that...

This system is going to upset those people who don't really see magick as working that way. Equally, it can be heavy going for a novice faced with the task of grasping both the background and exactly how everything works.

The magick system is very free form, giving only general parameters of what a Mage can do at each stage of his advancement path. It's up to the player, guided by the few examples given, to come up with practical applications. It can be very involving, though. Developing your own personal style of magick and getting away with using it can be immensely rewarding. It's just not easy.

This is a pretentious, dark and often difficult game. However, it can also be a lot of fun, and it repays time invested in it many times over. The infinite number of other-worldly realms give opportunities for any number of styles of play.

If you like involving and challenging games you'll enjoy this. If you want spell lists and easy-to-use world shaking powers, look elsewhere.

Adam Tinworth

But I've already got it!

So, what advantages does this second edition offer to those who play the first? Well, for a start a nice hardback book that shrugs off coffee spills with consummate ease and makes a satisfying 'thunk' when used to discipline errant players. However, most gamers will look a little deeper than that before shelling out their money.

Don't expect a major rules revision. The basic Storyteller system remains intact. It is in the game-specific rules that the changes are obvious. Several rules have been tightened up and better explained, most noticeably those dealing with Quintessence and Paradox. Much of this will already be familiar to owners of the supplements, particularly the *Book of Shadows*. Even if you haven't read them, the chances are any half-competent group will have resolved these issues themselves.

The magick descriptions have been tinkered with a little, so the top level of each sphere is a little more powerful, but given the changes to the Paradox rules, it's nothing that's going to make much difference to the game.

That leaves the much-expanded and developed background. The concept of the Mage's path is a good addition to the game, giving a much more defined aim for the players than just filling in those dots on the sheet. The greater detail on the Ascension War and the relationship of the various factions could well provide a source of inspiration if you are beginning to get stuck for ideas. But you'll be hard pushed to justify spending nearly £17 for inspiration alone.

That said, if you're the sort of person who has sat around with all five of the Storyteller games and tried to figure out how they all fit together, buy this book. Now. Probably because it's the first of the games since the series was completed with *Changeling: The Dreaming* to reach second edition, it gives the most complete picture of the various Umbral realms yet. You'll sleep much better at nights once you know. Trust me.

And the players said...

CHRIS There are two things you need to do in order to play *Mage*. First, get a 'find obscure White Wolf rule' skill at rank four. And second, f**k the Paradox!

KATHERINE Er, what happened? What's going on?

KARL The good ol' dark and nasty feel is still there, but the only real change is clearer magick, making even Marauder-wannabes like Chris think twice. Occasionally.

Mage: The Ascension has a background called arcane which, oddly enough, is not the ability to produce a roleplaying magazine. It's the ability to appear too ordinary to notice or remember. Hmm.

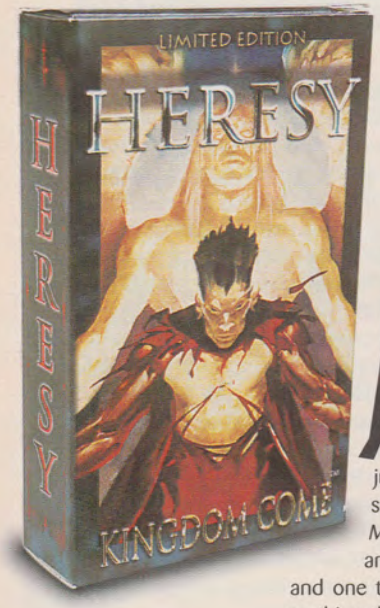
Score 8/10

A collectable card game

Heresy

Last Unicorn Games 001 717 7309693 **Out now**

Starter Decks £7.95 15-card boosters £2.25



Just what would happen if Heaven and Hell collapsed? Hmm... Good question...

I don't know about you, but I've never really been bitten by the *collectable* side of the collectable card game phenomenon. I've always liked playing games – not just roleplaying games but all sorts of games – and to me *Magic* is just another game. It's an extraordinarily good game, and one that I still enjoy playing, but if anything the collectable bit of the game gets in the way: it stops you from playing the game you want to; you are always limited by the cards that you've bought rather than your imagination. But now that I've seen *Heresy* I realise my problem was that I wasn't into collecting *Magic* cards for their own sake. All that has changed with *Heresy*.

These are beautiful cards, featuring dark and sombre illustrations in the graphic-novel style. They're shaped like Tarot cards and are treated with a wax laminate (like **arcane**'s cover) that makes them feel as good as they look. But, above all, I think it's the subject matter that appeals most: angels and demons collide with high-tech equipment and weird humans, and that's a lot more refreshing than any tired old Tolkien re-hashes. These are eminently collectable cards.

Heresy is a post-apocalyptic game for two to five players. Heaven and Hell have fallen and all the Celestial beings now inhabit a grim near-future populated by cults and mutants. You play the part of a major Celestial being, and the object of the game is to collect enough mystical energy, or Tau, and re-ascend to a higher plane.

The gameplay is very similar to *Magic: The Gathering*. You bring into play lands that provide you with power to summon beings who fight for you; there are Enhancement cards that add powers to your beings; there are Miracle cards that provide you with unique actions that you can use to counter your opponents; and there are Artifacts that have special uses. Instead of the five different colours of Magic (plus Artifacts, of course, making six really), there are eight different Influences to which all the cards belong. In addition to these similarities to Magic, there are also aspects of many other CCGs present. For example, there's a voting system similar to the one you'll find in *Rage* and you need to control certain Influences in order to bring some cards into play, as you do in *Vampire: TES* or *Shadowfist*.

Where *Heresy* is unique is that the lands that you bring into play are divided into two clearly different kinds: Domains and Arrays. Domains are lands in the traditional Magic sense, but Arrays represent computer networks, and it is in these that you must store the Tau you need to win. Your characters can Jack in and out of these Arrays and some characters (Constructs) are a special kind that can only exist in the Arrays. This means that you have two different battle grounds in play; you must defend and attack in both the real and the Array's virtual worlds. All of this adds greatly to the strategies and tactics you need to employ to win.

Heresy also has the advantage of being a late starter in the CCG stakes. You

Among the artists working on *Heresy* is Tim Bradstreet, one of Andy's favourites. He's best known for his work for White Wolf, especially on the first edition of *Vampire*. He's also done a lot of work for *Shadowrun*.

can see this most clearly in the rules which, although far from perfect, are still some of the best and most sensible CCG rules we've ever seen in the **arcane** office. They take the time to explain everything in detail, as a result of which there are very few queries that cannot be resolved with the application of a little common sense and some careful re-reading of the appropriate section. These are also the first CCG rules I've come across that made me feel sufficiently comfortable to start playing a game after reading them through for the first time.

Once you get into the game, the first thing to strike you is its unique atmosphere. This is partly a function of the superb cards, but it also owes a great deal to the game mechanics. Your Celestial beings, for example, have Ranks and can gain Titles that allow them to do certain things; they can join together in great Assemblies to attack or defend, giving them greater power than if they acted individually, and they have a sense of individual honour that lets you call out challenges across the battlefield. These challenges are resolved in the celestial senate, or Aereopagus, with each player being able to cast votes for the challenger or challenged. In addition, the Matrix (which is the term used for the collection of computer Arrays) has a completely different atmosphere to the rest of the game; here Viruses lurk ready to ensnare the unwary, Intrusion Counter-measures guard the powerful networks and weird electronic beings flit about the grid.

Heresy is a wonderful game that proves that startlingly original atmosphere is just as important as innovative mechanics in CCGs. All right, it does suffer from being just a little too much like *Magic*, and it has been our experience that games can stagnate a little towards the end, but that probably stems as much from our lack of cards and deck-building experience as it does from any real failing in the game itself. After all, the basic mechanics behind it are very tried and tested.

Steve Faragher

There are 376 cards in the Unlimited *Heresy* set (which is the one reviewed here). Last Unicorn seem to be more generous than other card companies, though, with 3 rares and 12 uncommons in each starter deck.

And the players said...

ANDY "The rules may not be particularly original, but it's great fun."

CLIFF "Good atmosphere, but I found it slightly lacking in tension."

JON "I love it, let's have another go."

Score 8/10

HOW SHE IS PLAYED...

There are more things in Heaven and Hell

To the left is an Array with three points of Tau stored on it. A Construct called Juggler is at the Array and could help in its defence, if necessary, or attack an opponent's Array.

Domains provide aura, which is necessary to bring other cards into play. The symbol on the top right of the card is the Influence. In this case it's devotion. There are two sets of numbers on the left of the card. The first gives the attack and defence values of the domain.

On the left is a straightforward Heathen Group.

To the right is a Celestial Host to whom a Title, conferring a special ability, has been attached.

When a card has had its action it is Opened, or turned sideways. Reminds me of another game that, but I can't quite put my finger on which one.

A sourcebook for Shadowrun

California Free

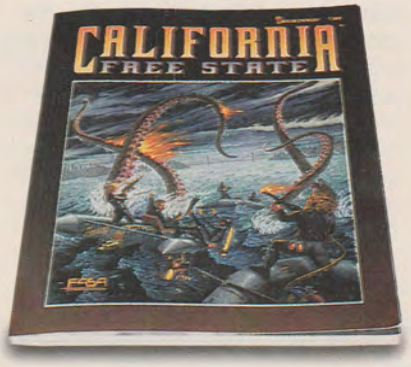
FASA Corp | 001 312 243 5660 | £12.99 | Out now

Abandoned by the government, invaded by the Japanese and under threat from the north and the south. Sounds tough.

Although FASA's *Shadowrun* was originally set in 21st Century Seattle, in the years since the company has proceeded to describe more and more of the surrounding game world. *California Free State* is the latest in the line of 'area' sourcebooks and, as the title rather strongly suggests, deals with California.

As with most sourcebooks for *Shadowrun*, *California Free State* is split into two main parts. The bulk of its 160 pages are taken up by the sourcebook proper, which once again takes the form of an 'electronic document' posted to the game's Shadowland BBS. A shorter Game Information section at the back deals with any new rules and other, well, game information. There are also a number of maps of areas and cities, and a fold-out overview of the entire State.

The source information itself is split into sections, each dealing with a separate area of California – the Northern Crescent, Central Valley, San Francisco Bay Area, Big Sur Coast, Los Angeles, and the Mojave Desert complete with the usual comments, rumours and opinions posted by characters from the game world. It begins with a brief introduction that gives an overview of the entire state, including information on how to get there, local price variations, and a timeline of major events over the last 60 years or so. California has been a 'free state' – effectively an independent country – since being kicked out of the United Canadian and American States in 2036. The new government was unable to cope with the demands placed on it, and almost immediately gave up on large areas of the State.



The Northern Crescent, the northern-most area of California, was invaded by Tir Tairngire as soon as the UCAS troops were withdrawn. Although the Tir elves were eventually pushed back from the city of Reading by Californian guerillas, much of the land to the north of the city is still 'disputed'. With neither side currently willing to start another war, the Crescent has been left to fend for itself. The result is an anarchic patchwork of small towns, each with their own leader or council, all competing and squabbling with each other. Oh, and there's a dragon involved as well, just to makes things even more interesting.

The Central Valley was once dubbed 'the salad bowl of America', and in 2057 agriculture is still the mainstay of the area. It's also the only place where the 'government' still holds some semblance

California has always suffered from a shortage of water – most of it is reclaimed desert, after all. In *Shadowrun*'s version of the State this problem has got even worse, and in certain areas runners can make a lucrative career from 'water-jacking'.

"California Free State is without a doubt one of the best 'area' sourcebooks for Shadowrun so far."

California uber alles?

Although *California Free State* is a great sourcebook, packed full of inspiration, any referees thinking of shipping their players off to the 2057 version of the 'Sunshine State' should be aware that racism, of one sort or another, is inherent to much of the area.

Of course, the topic is hardly new to *Shadowrun* – the game has used the tensions between the human and meta-human races as a metaphor for modern-day discrimination right from the start. For the most part, though, the subject has been something individual referees can choose to ignore or avoid dealing with to a great extent.

California Free State is the first supplement in which the issue is inherent to the setting, especially in the Northern Crescent, Central Valley, and San Fransisco areas.

This is not something that's going to bother everyone. But if dealing with the issue of racism in your gaming sessions doesn't appeal, bear in mind that you'll need to make some quite major changes to some of the background.

State

of power. Unfortunately, what power it does have is supplied by the mega-corps which prop it up, and most of the politicians holding positions of power are white human supremacists.

Ever since the Japanese effectively invaded the city, the San Francisco Bay Area has been an low-level urban war zone. Just about everyone who didn't work for a Japanese mega-corp was immediately kicked out into the surrounding areas, and they didn't like it much. A coalition of the urban poor and meta-humans now does its best to make life difficult for the occupiers.

The Big Sur Coast, largely deserted when Aztlan invaded and captured San Diego, is now an area of contradictions. Much of the area (and the ocean nearby) is horribly polluted, but the agri-corps still run huge fish-farms off the coast to the north. In the south, most of the land is controlled by three pirate bands, all locked in a vicious struggle for power.

Los Angeles, still the State's largest population centre, is now a free city. Abandoned by the government and left to its own devices, the rich and powerful entertainment corporations have walled off large areas. Inside the enclaves the ultra-rich and ultra-famous live a life of luxury. Outside, people starve.

Finally, there's the Mojave Desert. With the exception of the heavily defended resort of Palm Springs, this is a harsh, unforgiving environment with few towns, even fewer people, and some very strange magic.

The potential for gaming offered by places like this is probably obvious, and *California Free State* is without a doubt one of the best 'area' sourcebooks for *Shadowrun* so far. There's been a tendency in the past for FASA to publish sourcebooks about areas of the game world that, while important and often interesting, were really impractical places to set your games – unless you had incredibly tough player characters or were feeling particularly sadistic. Just getting into or out of some of them is virtually impossible, for a start.

Shadowrun players concerned with the apparent increase of magic in the game should be pleased by *California Free State*'s host of more 'mundane' opportunities. Not that the potential isn't there if you want it...

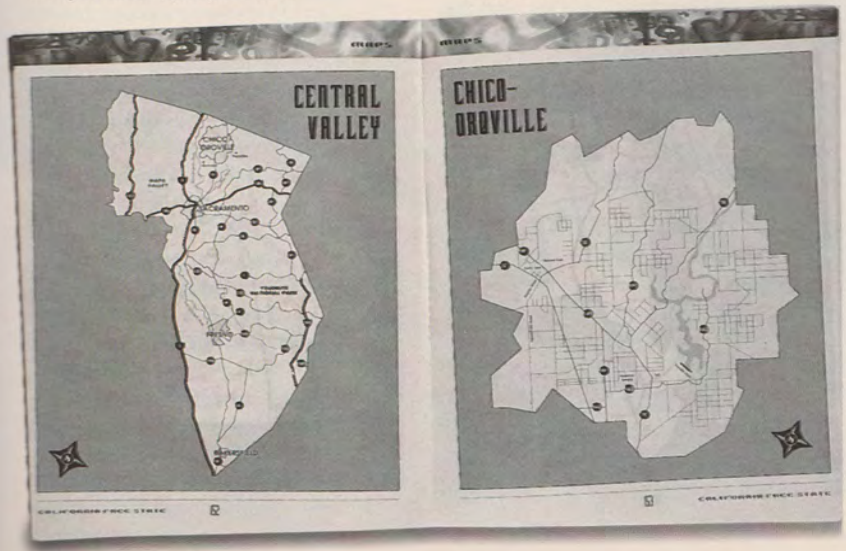
The results of the UCAS election – which begins with the release of *Super Tuesday* in April – might have significant effects on the Free State, with some candidates feeling that California should become part of the Union once again.

California Free State, though, is ideally suited as a setting for *Shadowrun*. The whole book is packed with ideas, inspiration and potential plot hooks, and the different situations in the various areas allow for many different styles of game. Anything from the subtle conflicts of power politics up to open warfare is possible, all within the same State. Rather than being stuck for ideas after a couple of adventures, the problem facing the referee will be what to do next.

Regardless of what style of game you play, then, *California Free State* has a great deal to offer any *Shadowrun* group. Excellent stuff.

Andy Butcher

Score 9/10



Two *Dark Sun* campaign expansions for *AD&D*

Windriders of the Jagged Cliffs & Mind Lords of the Last Sea

£9.99 & £11.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

It's not all desert on Athas — there's water and wind, too.

The first examples of the *Wanderer's Chronicles*, these two accessories detail areas of Athas far from the city of Tyr. Both boast the same page count and follow the same format – blurb on the location and an introductory adventure – but whereas *Windriders* is a self-contained volume, *Mind Lords* is split into two books and costs two quid more. Each comes with a fold-out colour map.

Nestling in communities dotted along the faces of the Jagged Cliffs is a race of halflings that traces its lineage directly back to the Blue Age. Unlike the more common feral halflings, these form a sophisticated society steeped in ritual and history. They place a high value on life of all sorts and, by means of half-remembered fantastical genetic engineering techniques, manipulate it to create their own tools and creatures.

An awful lot of sustained creative effort has gone into *Jagged Cliffs*. The halfling society is concrete, detailed, believable and enticing, and the accompanying adventure, while not earth-shattering, serves as a decent introduction to the area.

Mind Lords, by comparison, fails to convince. It depicts a society, like that of *Jagged Cliffs*, isolated for thousands of years from the remainder of Athas, in this case by the will of three psionicists who have immortalised themselves. Things are pretty quiet around the Last Sea, especially in the Mind Lords' city, where people are happy by decree. Mental harmonisation awaits those who can't settle down.

The most unusual aspect of the Mind Lords' domain is the sea itself. Such a large body of water is unheard of on Athas, and entails a whole load of new rules, equipment and modes of behaviour. Among the highlights are the beach druids, who spend their days surfing and seeking fulfilment in the perfect wave.

As the players' first experience of the Last Sea area, the *Mind Lords* adventure is poor. For a start, there's hardly anything to kill – instead, the characters must spend most of their time tracking down (I kid you not) the missing brain of one of their number. It's one of those adventures where the very existence of the entire realm hangs in the balance, which is all very well for high-level characters, but it seems over-the-top for new arrivals on the scene. And, to top it all, the characters' actions don't affect the outcome. If they succeed (or rather fail, since there's a time-travel twist involved) then all's fine; if they fail, then a super-powerful Mind Lord comes along to set everything to rights anyway. Contrived and pointless.

Cliff Ramshaw

Windriders Score 7/10

Mind Lords Score 4/10

Cleric's Challenge II

An adventure for *AD&D*

£4.50 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

Picture the scene: you've just come back from the pub, all bevied up, and you're in the mood to give the forces of evil a piece of your mind. Trouble is, there's nobody else around except the mate whose arm you regularly twist to referee… That's where TSR's one-on-one adventures come in.

This one is for a cleric between fourth and sixth level, preferably one with a fondness for the odd tipple. You are sent into a rural community of competing wineries. Years ago its temple was razed, the priest went missing, and the wineries' rivalry turned sour. Your mission is to go to the village and help the new priest, who is having difficulties attracting worshippers to the rebuilt temple.

Upon your arrival you discover something that smells strongly of brandy is conducting a series of bizarre murders. It's something of a who's-doing-it: you must use your powers of roleplaying and deduction to interview the diminishing cast of colourful locals to find the source of this evil and do away with it.

Not high fantasy by any means, but *Cleric's Challenge II* is sufficiently intriguing and original to keep most players entertained for a night or two.

Cliff Ramshaw Score 7/10

James Bond 007: Golden Eye

A collectable card game

60-card Starter Deck £6.75 15-card Booster packs £1.99 Heartbreaker 001 610 626 2259 Out now

Of all the card games spewed forth this month, *007: Goldeneye* will probably be remembered as the one with the most potential, a potential which, unfortunately, hasn't been realised. The cards look the part, with stills from the Bond movies, snappy one-liners and enough icons and stats to give the impression that there's going to be gameplay depth, but this is not the case.

007 plays like a game of *Magic* that has gone stale – you know the kind, where each player is laying down forces but never has enough of an advantage to make it worthwhile launching an attack. To win the game you must accrue Plot Points, achieved by laying down Plot cards of your own and 'overcoming' (read: capturing)

your opponents'. You capture them by using your Bond cards, augmented with various items developed by 'Q' and by friendly personalities.

It sounds great, but in practice very little gets done – it's too hard to get all of the necessary icons and scores together. Instead, each player builds up his own Plots until he has the required number, at which point he declares himself a winner. It's more of a race than a game of strategy.

Paul Pettengale **Score 5/10**

Player's Secrets of Ariya

A sourcebook for the *AD&D Birthright* campaign

£4.50 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

Although they're very worthy, many Birthright sourcebooks read like history lessons on crop rotation and begetting. Ariya, a sun-kissed domain on the south coast of Khinasi, is exceptional if only because rather than yet another variation on Northern European feudalism it's an altogether more romantic, magical and unfamiliar place – one that owes much to the Arabian Nights.

The theocratic domain is ripe for rule by a paladin or lawful-good priest. Until recently, rulers have been strangling their siblings on ascension to the throne, but Ariya is moving with the times: nowadays it suffices to keep them locked in a tower.

Although the domain of Ariya is imbued with a spicy richness, the plot hooks that end the sourcebook are somewhat ordinary. There's a religious war threatening from the west, another war from the north, pirate activity... They're not *bad*, just not as imaginative as the setting itself. Still, there's plenty here to get a good referee improvising.

Cliff Ramshaw **Score 7/10**

Player's Secrets of Talinie

A sourcebook for the *AD&D Birthright* campaign

£4.50 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

Talinie is a theocracy suitable for rule by a lawful priest or a paladin with a penchant for flowers, but not everything is sweetness and light. The heavily wooded, mineral-rich land has been extensively exploited in an effort to improve the economy. The policy has worked, but the price is environmental →

An adventure supplement for *Don't Look Back*

Giant Psychic Insects from Outer Space

£10.95 Mind Ventures 001 601 324 3931 Out now

It's not as silly as it sounds. Honest...

Look no further than the title of this supplement for the excellent *Don't Look Back* RPG (see page 60 for a review of the second edition) and you'd be forgiven for thinking that it's a typically outrageous scenario for the equally excellent *Paranoia* (West End Games' highly humourous game of a dark future). Either that or a piss-poor 1950s B-movie. Peel back the cover and start reading, however, and it soon comes to light that this source material and series of three linked adventures is not as over-the-top as it might first appear.

Brief plot summary (players close your eyes now!): an alien race that has been studying humanity for more than a decade, conducting 'intimate' tests on human subjects and then brainwashing away the memories of the victims, has run into a problem – one of its spaceships has crashed near a remote American town. The only survivor, a young woman upon whom the aliens were intending to experiment, has been taken in by a local boy, not knowing that the alien blood that covers her contains nanotech microbes which, if they get into the bloodstream, slowly transform the recipient into a half-alien hybrid...

From here the plot thickens until it's positively solid – competing groups with interests in alien activity try to outwit each other and the PCs, all vying for proof of alien activity (or, in the case of one secret society, to make sure the world remains oblivious of the alien threat). The PCs should remain largely ignorant as to what's going on, thinking at first that they're supposed to be investigating the disappearance of a young woman. There is an option to introduce the PCs to the scenario by casting them as abductees held within the space craft when it crashes, but I wouldn't advise this route – it makes the whole campaign a bit obvious from the outset.

There are flaws in this series of scenarios (in truth there are only two investigations – the first of the three adventures plays out the crash on the assumption that the PCs are in the ship and is very, very short), the most significant of which is the way the second and third adventures are linked together. The PCs have to be lucky (or extremely unfortunate!) to make the link, and it's likely that the referee will have to fudge it, making things somewhat contrived. Also, despite the fact that this supplement is almost 100 pages long, the scenarios don't take long to play through: ten hours would be about right for an average group. Having said that, it is fun, it gives ample opportunity for future scenarios using the new alien race, and it reflects the feel of the *Don't Look Back* game well.

Paul Pettengale

Score 7/10

A collectable card game

Star Wars: Customizable Card Game

60-card Starter Set £6.95 **15-card Expansion Set £2.50** **Decipher Inc – in the UK**

contact CMA 01497 847309 **Out now**

A long time ago in a galaxy not very far away, the most popular science fiction film of all time was released. Now, 19 years later, the collectable card game has arrived.

1996 is going to be the CCG 'year of licence'. We've had *The Crow* (**arcane** 3), *Middle-earth: The Wizards* (**arcane** 4). Now *James Bond* (page 68) and *Star Wars* are here.

Star Wars is a two-player game. One controls the Dark Side of the Force, and the other the Light. The cards are split into two sets, one for each. The object is to drain the opponent's Force (represented by his deck) to nothing.

The game is cleverly designed, and simple to play. The idea of using your deck as your 'life' is an interesting one, and the game lends itself to a variety of styles and strategies. The cards themselves – all of which feature stills from the film – are well presented and manage to capture the atmosphere and 'feel' of *Star Wars* surprisingly well.

Which makes the game's problems so disappointing. *Star Wars* is let down by two things: it's rulebook and the distribution of the cards.

The rules aren't well written: to get anywhere with the game you'll need to spend some time working things out for yourself and reading through the inevitable Frequently Asked Questions list – fine for those with Internet access who can get hold of it, but not very helpful for those who can't.

The central flaw, though, is the way in which Decipher have split up the cards, with rarity equating to power. All the major film characters are rare cards. Worse, a starter deck only contains one rare for each side, and a booster only has one rare, which may be Light or Dark. In addition, many of the common cards rely on rarer cards to be useful.

The basic set of *Star Wars* doesn't even contain some of the film's most popular characters (to get Chewbacca, for example, you're going to have to wait for the first expansion set).

From eight starter decks and over twenty boosters, I got one big character: Luke. However, I was stuck with dozens of cards like 'Han's Back', which allows you to bring Han back into play if he's killed).

Building a tough *Star Wars* deck, or even one that features some major characters, will take a lot of money. The only people who benefit from this are the speculators, not gamers. It's in sharp contrast to the policy adopted by ICE for *Middle-earth: The Wizards*, for which even a single starter deck is guaranteed to contain at least three big characters, and where common cards are the most general-purpose, with rares being progressively more specialised. It's also exactly the same problem that Decipher had with their *Star Trek: The Next Generation* CCG. Some companies never learn.

Andy Butcher

Score 5/10

← degradation and control of the mining and timber guilds passing covertly to foreign powers. How can you heal the land without impoverishing your people?

On the southern border the army of Boeruine is ready to provide the same sort of support that Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan received from the USSR. Your high priest pursues religious unity with a vigour to make Spain's Grand Inquisitor blush. There's also the thorny question of progress. Your wizard has discovered how to maximize the land's magic potential (depleted by cultivation and mining), but the ethics are ambiguous to say the least.

This sourcebook should appeal to the 'set the world to rights' brigade. It's just as well that there's so much going on, though, because the domain itself, for all its crofts, flower gardens and glass blowing, won't hold your interest for long.

Cliff Ramshaw **Score 6/10**

Warriors and Priests of the Realms

An accessory for the *AD&D Forgotten Realms* campaign

£11.99 **TSR 01223 212517** **Out now**

Can't distinguish between your warriors? Is the number of cure spells all that differentiates your priests? This collection of character kits aims to help.

Each kit lists basic class information (ability requirements, starting money and so on) and proficiencies, followed by a general overview, a physical description, roleplaying cues, and advantages and hindrances. Warriors are organised geographically, priests according to faith. The information is specific to the *Forgotten Realms* campaign, although it *is* possible to tailor everything to your own world.

As well as the (mainly) uninspiring kits, the Harper and Crusader character classes are detailed. Harpers are fighter-rogue types given to combating evil, while Crusaders are fighter-cleric types, a little like Paladins, but of any alignment.

Really, if you're stuck for ideas on how to characterize your newly rolled fighter then you ought to consider giving up fantasy roleplaying – it's not as if there's a shortage of archetypes to choose from. Priests are more tricky, and the priest kits definitely exhibit more imagination than their warrior counterparts. Even so, do you really want to spend this much money to flesh out one or two characters?

Cliff Ramshaw **Score 4/10**

Forged Of Darkness

A supplement for *AD&D*

£7.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

29 new and ungodly artifacts have been unearthed in the world of *Ravenloft*. Each has its own vile history and, used properly, a wonderfully evil future.

Most *D&D* artifacts are baubles that can only be dangled in front of players to tempt them into campaigns, but never given to them because their extraordinary power is too disruptive. Those that have been *Forged Of Darkness*, though, are a little different.

Each item described in this 'catalogue of items arcane' offers great – but not extreme – powers and, in keeping with the *Ravenloft* ethic, the price for their use is suitably nasty. These relics are also refreshingly bizarre, not limited to the normal swords, shields, rods and rings, which makes working out their powers and curses that more entertaining.

The creations of master toy maker Guiseppe, the time pieces fashioned in the Workshops of Klorr and the Hands Of The Dead are the highlights. As collections they offer a range of intertwined powers around a single theme, which adds to the all pervading sense of menace.

All referees who manipulate a *Ravenloft* world will want to unearth these items. Low-levellers can be sent to recover or transport them for others, while more potent players will get some serious fun from playing with these toys. They're dangerous, but for *Ravenloft* that's ideal.

Trenton Webb **Score 8/10**

Monsters & Amazons

An expansion for *Dragon Dice*

Eight-dice kicker pack £4.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

If TSR normally do one thing really well, it's produce support material for their new games. So a scant four months after we saw *Dragon Dice* we're already being treated to the first expansion set, *Monsters & Amazons*. Unfortunately it turns out to be not as much of a treat as you might expect. This is because of the distribution of the dice. Each of these Kicker Packs contains eight dice, but the one that TSR sent me had only two Amazon dice and just one monster; the other five dice were →

A fantasy combat game

Lost Worlds

£3.95 Flying Buffalo 001 602 945 6917 Out now

concise rules for pure, unadulterated hacking and slaying – what more could you ask for?

Anyone remember the rather spiffing *Ace of Aces* air combat game? Two players took the part of fighter pilots locked in mortal combat. Each used an illustrated book that described the action and included a nifty cross-referencing system that enabled the players to determine the consequences of their combined manoeuvres. *Lost Worlds* is along the same lines, and by the same designer, but in a fantasy setting.

Currently there are four booklets available, each representing a different fantasy character (a magical centaur, a mummy, a barbarian beauty and a scorpion wizard) and costing £3.95; more are planned. The players each select a character, and combat begins. Both players choose their moves (there are specialised rules for fights involving more than two players); a couple of page turns and cross references later and they arrive at the pages describing the outcome. Strikes and spells remove 'body points' from the opponent; once an opponent reaches zero body points or below the game is over.

The system is both incredibly simple – there aren't even any dice rolls involved – and wonderfully ingenious. Different characters have different manoeuvres available. For instance, the barbarian beauty can choose between shielded attacks or attacks with both sword and dagger, while trampling and kicking options are open to the centaur and spells to the scorpion wizard. Certain outcomes modify the moves available to a player in the next go. If you are disarmed, for example, then you must make a successful 'retrieve weapon' move before you can use that weapon again. The simplicity is reflected in the rules: three sides of A5 are all you get, although a bit more would have been nice – there are one or two unclear points.

The Lost Worlds picture books are being re-released. What differentiates the new improved items from their forebears is (surprise surprise) the addition of Fantasy Cards. These detail items, spells, luck and the like that enable players to modify damage and body point scores throughout the game. Four come with each booklet. Booster decks will be available in due course.

While flying one plane in *Ace of Aces* was pretty much the same as flying another, the characters of *Lost Worlds* are strongly differentiated with their own sets of moves. While this adds extra interest to the format, it also presents difficulties. In play you often find yourself in a situation with no clear idea of how you got there. It's difficult to join up the dots, as it were. Both players must make a special effort to 'narrate' their actions and help each other visualise what is happening.

Although *Lost Worlds* is fun, there isn't a great deal of longevity in the format. It's not going to keep you occupied for hours at a time. On the other hand, it represents a great means of resolving certain combat situations in your RPG system of choice.

Cliff Ramshaw

Score 6/10

Flying Buffalo are asking other companies to release *Lost Worlds* books too and are also producing tournament rules.

A sourcebook for *Wraith: The Oblivion*

Guildbook: Sandmen

£8.99 White Wolf Games 001 404 292 1819 Out now

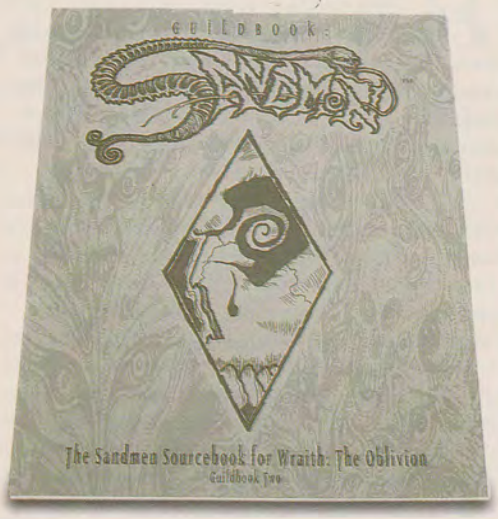
Nightmares, fantasies and dreams: tricks of the mind, or of the dead?

For the restless dead of White Wolf's World of Darkness, the living are a fundamental source of power. It's their activities, thoughts and memories that provide Wraiths with Pathos, the force that fuels their after-life. But few are the ways that Wraiths can interfere with the living. One of these is through invading and manipulating dreams, and the practitioners of Phantasm, as this ability is known, are referred to as Sandmen.

This supplement is the second of the Guildbooks that develop the various Arcanos (wraithly powers) from *Wraith: The Oblivion*, and the culture and societies that surround each. The first dealt with the Guild of Artificers, delightful ghosts who specialise in melting down other wraiths in soulfire forges and hammering them into swords, coins, buildings and, occasionally, garden furniture. It was something of a disappointment, parading a series of hoary clichés about blacksmiths.

Guildbook: Sandmen is an altogether better affair, giving a fascinating and original look into the theatrical nature of the Sandmen, their political intrigues and the multi-faceted uses of their abilities.

The main section of the book is divided into four sections. The first explains the history of the Sandmen, both in Stygia, the West's underworld, and elsewhere. The second explains the Guild's current role, the different forms of Sandmen and their relationship with both the underworld and the other denizens of the World of Darkness. The third gives a few rules additions (something White Wolf always seems to find distasteful) while the fourth has sample characters.



Throw in an expanded character sheet, specifically for Sandmen, and the second part of a story that will continue through all the Guildbooks and tells of the long-outlawed Guilds' attempt to regain their place in wraith society, and you have the complete package.

The concept of Sandmen as the actors and entertainers of the underworld is an intriguing one. In a game where gloom and despair are prevalent, they add a needed light touch, without detracting from the game's nature. It's also easy to integrate into an existing campaign, an advantage in a system that already demands much from the storyteller.

This book is by no means an essential buy, as the ideas won't suit every group's style of play. But for any campaign that features a Sandman, it is a useful source of inspiration and colour in an environment that, by nature, lacks either. If the Guildbooks continue to improve like this, the Shadowlands have the potential to become one of the richest of game settings..

Adam Timworth

Score 7/10

ones I'd already collected from the basic set. And frankly, that's not good enough. I wouldn't expect to pay a fiver for three useful dice, would you?

Once you've got over the disappointment the Amazons look rather good. They tend to have a bit more magic than the older races, but that's balanced by them being unable to double their magic at certain locations. Their other abilities include being able to count manoeuvre results as missiles when they're on flatland terrain (to represent the added impetus given them by their chariots apparently) and they may also use missile fire from the reserve area, although only to their home or an opponent's frontier terrains.

The monsters are similarly exciting, providing all kinds of one-off talents such as Smother, Confuse, and Regeneration to your army. However they do suffer one major problem – because they're ten-sided dice the area of each face is too small for them to have the correct number of icons printed on them. This means that you have to count each monster icon as four ordinary icons. Not very convenient when you're trying to tot up quickly.

So, interesting new dice but frankly not enough of them. I hate to think what it would cost to get together a decent Amazon army…

Steve Faragher **Score 6/10**

Rifts: South America 2

A *Rifts* supplement

£11.99 Palladium Books Out now

This, the second *Rifts* supplement on South America, covers a broad variety of different regions and factions. Ancient civilizations, remnants of alien invasion forces, transdimensional mercenaries, a homestead populated by pre-rifts genetic experiments and a city of pro-human fanatics to name just a few. As if the tensions between these factions isn't enough, there are also giants, raiders and hidden cities of undead.

The setting manages to combine the things that Palladium Game fans want – mega-damage weapons, power armour, cybernetics and mutants – with traditional South American mythology. There are also a few interesting twists such as early Incan mummies, brought to unlife by the Great Cataclysm to turn on those who created them, and alien, cybernetic monsters with chameleon systems, who seek out worthy

opponents to fight. Predators? Yup! Most of the material is combat-orientated but, with that limitation in mind, what is presented is good.

There is no index, but there is a good contents list and Quick Find Table. New material – such as Nazcan line magic – is highly useable and straightforward. If you are used to *Rifts* or other Palladium systems, you shouldn't have much trouble with this. However, this isn't a book to buy as your first *Rifts* supplement because it constantly refers to other Palladium games.

Lucya Szachnowski **Score 6/10**

The Silver Key

An adventure for AD&D

£4.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

Soon there will be war. Orcs roam the country and the humans of the city of Horonshar prepare for the inevitable. Days ago a force of human soldiers was ambushed and an important military officer taken prisoner. With him was the Silver Key, a magical item that aids teleportation. A party of two to six adventurers, of levels two to eight, must infiltrate the orcish fortress, rescue the officer and retrieve the key before the orcs learn how to use it.

The catch is that the adventurers must be polymorphed into orcs before they start. A new set of rules details how players gain 'orc points' for convincing roleplaying. Get too many points and your character becomes an orc permanently. Fun, but unfair on the better roleplayers.

The Silver Key is also unusual in that no map is given for the orcish fortress. Instead, a flow chart is used. Regions of the chart determine encounters and information yielded, and the party moves from one region to another by means of dice rolls. It's more like *Monopoly* than *AD&D*; there's even a 'Go to jail' – sorry, 'Busted' – region. Unfortunately, this innovative method of portraying strangers' confusions in a fortress preparing for war means that players have next to little say over their own destinies. Even the two key locations here don't warrant maps.

The Silver Key's originality is marred by an over-reliance on the dice, its occasionally ambiguous rules, and a paucity of detail for critical locations and encounters. Experienced referees could turn it into an enjoyable jaunt; those less so should steer well clear.

Cliff Ramshaw **Score 6/10**

A supplement for *Changeling: The Dreaming*

Nobles: The Shining Host

£8.99 White Wolf Games 001 404 292 1819 Out now

Discover the secrets of the rulers of the faeries...

This *Changeling* supplement is about the fae nobility, or sidhe. These natural rulers are the most beautiful of the fae and the most inclined to fall in love. Their courts are rife with political and romantic intrigue which they consider to be a high art form.

This covers changeling politics, the ranks and privileges of power, and romance – both in official proceedings and behind-the-scenes plots, skulduggery and machinations. The information on changeling courts, the Parliament of Dreams, the strata of nobility, political factions and secret societies is detailed and useful – especially for use in freeform or live action roleplaying games.

The book is written with a lot more style, atmosphere and panache than the main *Changeling* rule book and contains more information than many of the *Vampire* clan books. There is a wealth of supplementary background on changeling history – though obviously from the point of view of the sidhe – and a new noble house, House Scathach.

The storytelling section gives away a few more secrets about fae history, details some excellent adversaries and menaces and also offers tantalizing hints on the truth about Arcadia. Storytellers would do well to keep players from reading this section, though this may be impossible.

The new abilities, backgrounds and arts are a worthwhile addition. In particular, I expect a lot of *Changeling* players will want to have characters who can manipulate time with the Chronos art. My concern is that cantrips which let players change the outcome of events or see into the past could create nightmares for GMs.

Nevertheless, *Nobles: The Shining Host* is an example of White Wolf at its best. It is evocatively written, full of useful material that inspires scenario ideas, has lovely, full-colour artwork and is reasonably priced. Despite its excellence, though, it's not without fault.

The lack of an index is frustrating, and an inadequate contents page doesn't make up for it. Additionally, as with other *Changeling* books, it only deals with the lands and personalities of Concordia, which consists of the North American Continent. While containing essential information if you are running a scenario set there, only the background details, atmosphere, new rules and cantrips will be useful if you are running a campaign set, say, in Britain. That probably doesn't matter to White Wolf, who know where their biggest market is, but it will leave those who prefer to set their Changeling games in the UK with quite a bit of work to do.

Lucya Szachnowski

Score 8/10

A *Birthright* adventure for *AD&D*

Warlock of the Stonecrowns

£5.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

The players finally get their hands dirty.

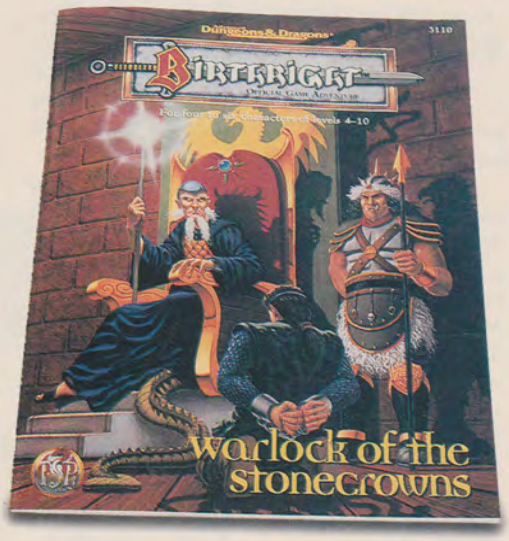
This is more like it. Too many *Birthright* adventures, overly concerned with issues of nobility and politics, suffer from vagueness or over-linear plotting, but not this one. This one boasts action aplenty.

The plot, though, is firmly rooted in the *Birthright* world. It concerns the Warlock, a scion of the awnshegh Gorgon, who is building an army in his Citadel in the Stonecrown mountains. He plans to wreak vengeance on his father, and he means to do it by conquering or extorting alliances from neighbouring domains.

Various hooks into the adventure are provided – all compelling – but the most likely is the players' need to investigate the sudden depletion of realm magic sources in domains adjacent to the Stonecrowns. With the aid of an enchanted cauldron the Warlock is accumulating realm magic to further his evil scheme. Each stage of said scheme is detailed in a four-year chart, so it's perfectly reasonable for the heroes to tackle the adventure piecemeal, coming back whenever they've gained sufficient experience to tackle the next hazard. A party of four to six characters of levels four to ten is recommended.

Just as the hooks are varied, so are the routes to the citadel. Parties travelling overland are likely to encounter the Warlock's army, while those that stumble upon an underground network of caves and passages may experience several encounters on the way. Suggestions for these are given, but details are left for the referee to flesh out.

The citadel itself is described in great detail. It's packed to the gills with the Warlock's minions, and



the personality and behaviour of each group and important NPC is given. The citadel is pretty much as you'd expect (there's only so much originality you can apply to this sort of thing, after all) but is augmented by the Warlock's fiendish magical traps. One interesting innovation is an adjacent shadow world, which uses the same map as the citadel proper (rather like the alternate world of Nintendo's *Zelda*). Characters entering the shadow world can gain valuable information, and face some truly horrific foes.

The whole thing climaxes with a showdown between the heroes and the Warlock. He's a bit of a monster, this one, but in certain circumstances he's prepared to deal. The module thoughtfully outlines the deals he's prepared to make and the circumstances under which he'll stick to his word.

This is an open-ended adventure blessed with a great deal of design attention, proving that detail is not inimical to freedom and that there's plenty of life left in the 'us chaps against the darklord' plot.

Cliff Ramshaw

Score 8/10

Monstrous Compendium Annual Volume Two

A thing for AD&D

£10.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

Monstrous Compendiums are odd beasts. They appear to offer vast new gaming options but rarely deliver. Their 'superstar' creatures invariably prove too powerful, the 'exotics' are exciting but awkward and the more manageable monsters are – to be honest – a little mundane.

Serious work goes into bringing the beasties to life, but the crippling list format means they limp rather than leap (or crawl, or slither, or fly for that matter) from the page. A fault this work compounds by further tweaking the experience points system. A factor that's made all the more frustrating when it becomes apparent that the *Monstrous Annual 2* dangles some delightful creatures before referee's eyes. It brings together the best of TSR's 1994 menagerie, collating animals historic, natural and fantastic from the company's many realms.

The star, without a shadow of a doubt, is the shambling Umpleby. Effectively a Bigfoot whose woolly hair generates shocking levels of static electricity, these hulking eccentric simpletons will test any parties patience and ability to save against cuteness.

Even without the Umpleby the *Monstrous Annual 2* would be a necessary resource for all mainstream refs. With the shaggy-haired one, though, it rapidly approaches the essential.

Trenton Webb Score 7/10

Neither Man Nor Beast

A scenario for AD&D Ravenloft

£5.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

A vicious storm maroons your party on a desert island. The good news is that you're all alive and in possession of most of your kit. The bad news is that it's quiet – too quiet...

It's a classic kick off for a classic scenario, which combines wilderness wandering, temple exploration, internecine fighting, bad magic and some heavy duty deceit. *Neither Man Nor Beast* leaves a party stranded on a small and inhospitable island until they work out what's going down or get killed. And death is a very real option, as really it should be for any poor

soul that becomes marooned here in the Demi-Plane of Dread.

Sadly, the fun of this scenario relies heavily on intricately linked secrets, which even if alluded too would ruin the game. So it's hard to describe much more than the locale – because even the island's name contains clues to its true nature. The fun is in the finding out, though, and the excitement in surviving to tell someone just what it was you found.

Neither Man Nor Beast is an elegant standalone adventure. It could slot into non-*Ravenloft* campaigns easily – everyone goes to sea eventually – but it's best for folk who already know the Demi-Plane of Dread. For when the island's secret is revealed they'll know precisely how slim their chances are.

Trenton Webb **Score 9/10**

Warlord's Tactical Manual

A players' guide for Blood Wars

£9.95 **TSR** 01223 212517 **Out now**

Offering several variations on play, new official game rules and a full pictorial card listing, the *Warlord's Tactical Manual* should have been in the hands of all *Blood Wars* players about six months ago. Arriving on the scene now, it is sadly a classic case of too little too late.

Blood Wars has unfortunately never appealed to anything more than a minority of players, being, as it is, so heavily influenced by TSR's *AD&D* campaign world of *Planescape*. This book is really just a life-belt that's being thrown to an already drowned man.

The book itself is mainly composed of illegible, poor-quality pictures of all the cards from the *Duel Starter Decks* through to *Escalation Set 3*. Although *Escalation Sets 2* and *3* are listed separately, the cards from *Booster Set 1* and the *Starters* are listed together, which inevitably causes confusion, especially for the collector who is card chasing: Which set does which card come from?

In all, this offers nothing to interest players who are not familiar with the *Planescape* setting, and for owners of *Blood Wars* its only redeeming factors are the hints on deck building, the tournament rules and the clarification of some of the original obscurities. And even these are probably not enough to justify the steep asking price.

Chris Baylis **Score 4/10**

A sourcebook for *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*

Red Talons Tribebook

£8.99 **White Wolf** 001 404 292 1819 **Out now**

of all the garou, the deadly red talons are closest to the wilds. but how do you roleplay a beast?

All the Tribebooks for *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* follow the same format, so if you've seen one, you'll have some idea of what you're getting for your money with the *Red Talons Tribebook*. Namely, the history of the tribe seen through their own eyes; the tribe's customs and beliefs, their unique gifts and some templates for various tribal members.

If any tribe needed this level of detail, it was the Red Talons. While most werewolves are an uneasy balance of man and beast, the Talons are all wolf. Almost all of the Talons are lupus, born of werewolf and wolf, and spending almost all of their life in the wild in lupine form. They are also the most extreme of the Garou, who believe humanity are agents of the Wyrm and need to be exterminated. They have few friends, even among the Garou, and a lot of enemies. Their lives revolve around hunting, territory and war.

Playing a Talon can be tough, as you need to develop a convincingly non-human character: Talons are the essence of *Werewolf*, a mixture of pathos and rage, a dying breed of warriors fighting a losing battle of genocide against humanity.

As with most White Wolf supplements, style often dominates substance, and the *Red Talons Tribebook* is often more of a story than a rulebook. It reads beautifully, supported by the usual superior artwork, but these are impressions more than instructions. The deliberate emphasis on mood and atmosphere is its strength as it fires the imagination, but it often ignores the practicalities.

This is a shortcoming as Talons will be very hard to integrate into a pack with other garou, due to basic communication problems and their extreme outlook on life. There are only two pages that specifically address roleplaying a Talon. Far more depth can be found in *The Way of the Wolf*, a supplement that covers lupus in general and the Talons in particular.

The Talons are a challenge worth persevering with, though, if only to see the faces of your packmates when you sniff the backside of a Shadow Lord dignitary during delicate negotiations or try talking to the water spirits in the toilet bowl.

This material is not essential to play the game, but it brings more life and colour to the most intriguing of the tribes. You, a human, will play the role of a wolf who lives to slaughter humans in revenge for their slaughter of wolves, and see your own species from a different perspective. For me, this is the epitome of what makes roleplaying so challenging and inspiring.

Mark Barter

Score 7/10

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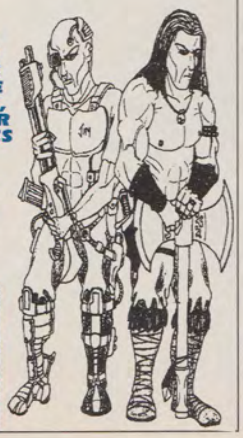

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Four gruesome chappies (9506, 31mm high) to give any player the willies. Delightfully ugly and misshapen, these pus-laden freaks look more than capable of handling themselves in a bar brawl, but are also armed effectively for more serious conflicts. Literally dripping detail from head to toe and well-moulded, these guys are a breeze to paint. The bodies and the clothes might be somewhat tattered, but the guns look perfectly functional, and they have plenty of spare ammo.

Heartbreaker – available from Gamecraft
0151 207 3737 Around £4.95

Familiars

These six tiny creatures (02017) will complement your mage character in practically any game. In fact anywhere you need a sitting cat, a standing cat, a bird, a weasel, a bat or a dragonette, you're sorted. The tallest is a mere 16mm high. They're very well detailed given the size and not dreadfully cast, although the bottoms of the bases aren't exactly flat and will need careful doctoring if the figures are to stand.

Reaper Miniatures, Texas USA
001 214 434 3088 Around £1.99

Triton's Sea Chariot

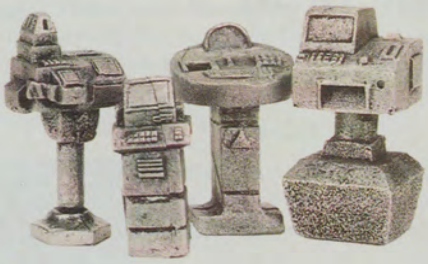
This diorama (1042, 95mm long) is of (surprise, surprise) Triton in his sea chariot, pulled by three dolphins and decorated by two mermaids. Unfortunately the superb sculpting and entirely competent casting is a little marred by the difficulty faced in deciding where the mermaids should go, no handy little diagram from these guys. Triton himself has a strangely stiff torso, but the mermaids' bodies are certainly (ahem) fluid in pose.

Awesome Enterprises
0115 967 4454 Around £12

miniatures

Data Banks

This pack of data banks from Grenadier (1537, an average of 25mm high) is just the thing to complete your science fiction diorama. They're not hugely original, nor are they brilliantly detailed, but they are nonetheless good solid chunks of hardware. You may want to buy a few packs if you expect your ship's bridge to have a uniform appearance, because as you can see from the selection here, some are more *Red Dwarf* than *Star Trek* – but on the positive side at least you get a good choice of styles in every pack. The miniatures are pretty tidy, but you may find that a little cleaning is required before any painting commences.



Grenadier Models – available from Minifigs
01703 220855 Around £2.95

Bugbear Champion

From the aptly entitled Nasteez range, the Bugbear Champion (1084, 45mm high) is a very cleanly cast model and shows reasonably good detail. At first, you'd be forgiven for thinking it's a minotaur – it takes a while to dissociate yourself from the standard bull man pose and notice its large ears. I guess it's not bad for the price – it is a very solid hunk of metal – and for those of you deeply ensconced in dungeon delving it'll almost certainly become a staple of your collection, particularly as it's the sort of large creature miniature that can quite easily be used to represent any number of assorted bad guys.

Grim Reaper Miniatures – available from Gamecraft
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Devil Hunter Yoko Pack

Not usually one to rave about 'babe' figures, I have to admit that these manga cuties (APM-010, 25mm high) are delicious. The Demon Queen's face is a little mangled, and Yoko's Granny is, well, old; but aesthetes should prepare to drool at Yoko's beautiful form, twice – once in full gear and once in her body stocking – that's her to the left. Four figures that are in true 25mm scale for a very reasonable price, and well cast too, makes these highly recommended.

Anime Projects *01248 370044* SRP £4.99

Steel Warriors

More cheap and cheerful plastic miniatures from Hobby Games. 30 stonkingly good robots, with many interchangeable bits that fit very well for less than a tenner. A licensed ICE product, they are however easily used wherever an armed robot is required. This is good news indeed. Clean detail and the silvered colour of the plastic makes them good enough to use without painting if you're feeling lazy.

Hobby Games, *01903 730998*
around £7.99 for 30

Azrael and Helmet Bearer

Hmm... the head is awfully small for such a large outfit, the bearer is awfully small for such a large helmet, and quite what the two extra bits are for is beyond me. Still, it could all be deliberate, and at least the helmet bearer is kinda dinky. The weapons are enormous, but thankfully the flash is not. All in all, another quirky offering from the *Warhammer 40K* range.

Games Workshop, mail order
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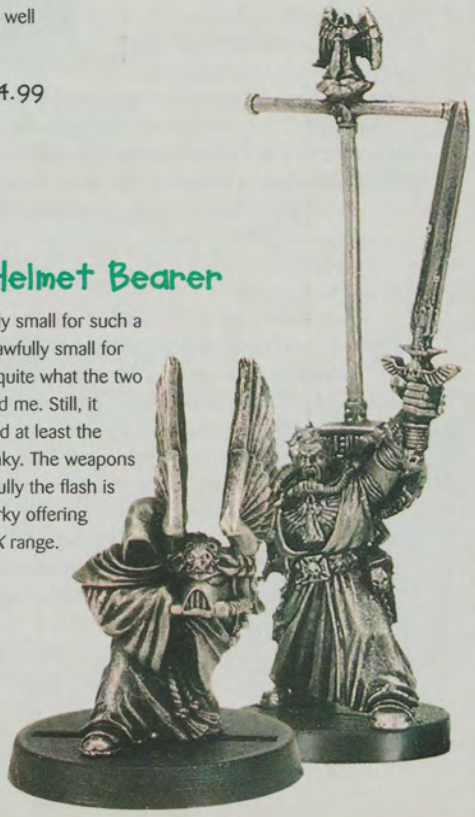


figures painted by Simon Chittenden

The Great Library

Wherein the latest literature is unravelled and the creatures of fantasy made flesh...

Martha Washington goes to War

by Frank Miller and Dave Gibbons

Published by Titan Graphic novel £10.99 Out now

It sounds like a comic fan's dream doesn't it? Frank Miller, he of *The Dark Knight Returns* fame, teams up with Dave Gibbons, the genius who drew *Watchmen*, and between them they deliver a biting satire on modern America. Unfortunately *Martha Washington Goes To War* doesn't quite deliver.

Don't get me wrong: this is good comic work. With the sumptuous Dave Gibbons artwork, superbly coloured by Angus McKie, that leaps off every page and jumps straight into your face, the tale of feisty Martha's exploits as a soldier during the Second American Civil War is entertaining, and the novel is jam-packed with ideas that an enterprising referee could add to his or her campaign with little difficulty.

"When I was a kid a bunch of bullies cornered me in the playground because I was small."

But while the ideas expressed in this novel are of a very high quality, the writing lacks Frank's ordinary venom, and the political bite of this satire is hard to find. Aside from the intriguing way that he uses issues of competence and non-competence to explore totalitarianism (this is a future where nothing works properly – an idea he freely admits he has 'borrowed' from Ayn Rand), there seem to be very few genuinely new discussions of the issues of race, power and technology that are at the core of this novel's narrative. Martha's gung-ho character jumps from adventure to adventure with scarcely a second thought and the rather clumsy philosophising is left to the secondary characters.

Frank Miller doesn't seem to be running out of things to say, just out of new ways of saying them.

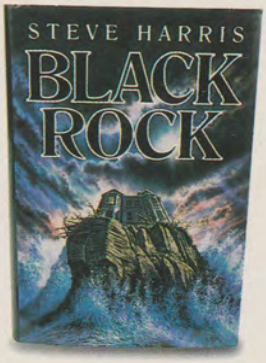
Steve Faragher

Score 7/10

Black Rock

by Steve Harris Published by Victor Gollancz

Hardback £16.99 Out now



If you like torture, you'll like this book. If you like wife-beating, you'll like this book. If you like the idea of a portal to hell being accessible from a geomantically centred house on the north coast of Cornwall, you'll like this book. If you don't think your sensibilities are up to this sort of thing, don't read this book – it will offend you.

If, however, you do, you're in for some dramatic special effects, some handy tips on how to write a convincing novel, and a hurtling ride towards an archetypal haunted house near Tintagel. Your companions are not the stereotypically stupid, hard-boiled sceptics of gothic horror; this is a modern-day story of a book editor's ex who reads a manuscript by an unknown author about a girl, herself, as it happens, who lives at Black Rock. The mysterious manuscript is a potential masterpiece. Indeed, the characterization is a little too good for our heroine and she doesn't like the way the plot's turning.

"When the boy grows up he'll be a writer. A very special kind of writer. One who can actually unweave the threads of reality and reconstruct them to suit himself."

Black Rock is not a masterpiece; the characters flatten out as the plot develops and I lost interest in their fate; but it is a good book. When Steve Harris masters combining good plots with convincing characterisation, he'll write some better books. He just hasn't quite perfected his craft yet.

Jonathan Palmer **Score 7/10**

Shadowdance

by Robin Wayne Bailey Published by White Wolf

Paperback £3.50 Out now

A crippled orphan named Innowen is given the ability to walk between sundown and sunrise. The beautiful witch responsible for bestowing this miraculous gift asks for one thing in return: he must, without fail, dance nightly in order to perpetuate his nocturnal mobility.

Here begins a very dreary tale. As a direct result of his newly granted ability to walk, Innowen is distastefully violated by his faithful guardian Drushen, who rounds off this bad behaviour by abandoning the young charge. Innowen becomes painfully aware that his gift is cursed, making voyeurs of his dance incapable of suppressing their darkest desires.

The story limps along, devoid of any real excitement. When events do pick

up momentum at the end of the book, they're handled clumsily; having waded through three quarters of the book you just don't feel rewarded by what transpires. The main problem is that the plot is predictable and simple, and the writing style basic and uninspiring.

"Vashni's pantings and thrustings grew embarrassingly loud."

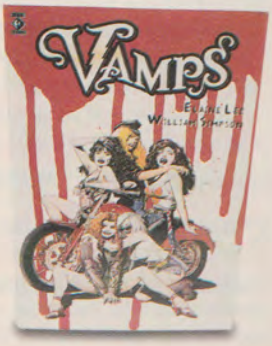
The only thing that differentiates this novel from others of its genre is that homosexuality is very heavily hinted at and apparently quite acceptable. Innowen forms a rather close relationship with his male companion, which nobody questions as being extraordinary. The two gratuitous scenes describing some rather nasty sexual acts are the only things that makes this book an adult read.

Maryanne Booth **Score 3/10**

Vamps

by Elaine Lee and William Simpson **Published by Titan**
Graphic novel £6.99 **Out now**

Vamps is a compilation of the limited-edition comics of the same name. The book tells the story of five modern-day female vampires, all created as 'brides' by the rather unpleasant Dave. It begins with the group deciding that they've had enough of being treated as slaves and lackeys.



Unfortunately for Dave, he doesn't see the imminent revolt coming, and is swiftly dealt with. Free from his influence, the five vamps – Howler, Screech, Whipsnake, Skeeter and Mink – head off across country. But Howler, the newly elected leader, is haunted by a secret from her mortal past, one which she feels driven to deal with.

"They measure time in drinks downed and quarters dropped, and the sunrise is their enemy... as it is mine."

The resulting story is a thoroughly modern look at vampires, and is by turns interesting, shocking and disturbing. Although the art is far from the best, it serves its purpose, and there are several very evocative sequences.

Vamps caused something of a stir when it was first released as a limited edition series, and it's easy to see why. In many vampire stories the underlying themes of sex and death are dealt with on a subtle level, but not here. *Vamps* is in your face, and may well cause mixed reactions, depending on the tastes of the reader.

Nonetheless, this is a well-crafted story, with some interesting new takes on one of our most popular myths. It's well worth a read. It's also a rich mine of ideas for referees running a modern-day game featuring vampires (of either sex). *Vampire: The Masquerade* referees, in particular, will find more than enough inspiration here for a complete campaign.

Andy Butcher **Score 8/10**

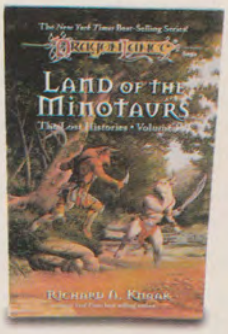
Land of the Minotaurs

by Richard A Knaak **Published by TSR** **Paperback £4.99** **Out now**

Apparently this is a *New York Times* bestseller; apparently the author has a good track record; apparently minotaurs can happily survive outside of Greek legend. And apparently we still have to put up with pot boilers like this that aim to flesh out the ethos of the *Dragonlance* world. Hrumph!

"Kaz did not doubt that he would have reason to wield his axe on his journey."

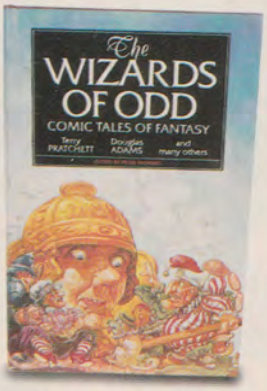
There is a bit of a plot: minotaur empire in decline; baddy minotaurs in control of the capital city; good minotaurs in small, idyllic encampment (yes, all the basic neo-fascist imagery of pure nature versus nasty city is ready and waiting). Good minotaurs are the final bastions of true →



The Wizards of Odd

Edited by Peter Haining **Published by Souvenir Press** **Hardback £15.99** **Out now**

You could review this fantasy collection by just listing some of the writers. For in it you can find Fritz Leiber, HG Wells, CS Lewis, Phillip K Dick, Douglas Adams, Ursula K Le Guin... Need I go on?



Okay then: Isaac Asimov, Larry Niven, Ray Bradbury, Arthur C Clarke... Brian Aldiss, Stephen Donaldson. Henry Kuttner... Do you need any more?

This is good. Forget your worries, put the cat out, and settle down. Escape for a little while – you're in good hands. Not only are all the people who contribute to this book great novelists, they are (or were) great short story writers too. *The Wizards of Odd* is a gathering of their more lighthearted and quirky works.

"The whistle blew half an hour ago. Hop to work.' 'Work-k-k?' The man seemed to have trouble with the word." from *The Twonky* by Henry Kuttner

And many of the stories make you laugh, too; others cause variously broad smiles or faint ones, or perhaps just raise an eyebrow. I defy anyone to read the Douglas Adams story without chuckling at least once; and the Avram Davidson work is worth singling out too – if you've never read anything of his before, you may want to after this. Some of the stories, like the one by Lord Dunsany, are truly ahead of their time; and all of them possess a great measure of poise and timing.

I don't really like recommending books for their 'value' to referees, but there are so many unusual worlds, unlikely characters and strange situations in the collection that it will prove a regular source of inspiration. This is one tome that won't be allowed to gather much dust.

It's difficult to award any anthology a perfect ten because some stories are inevitably better than others; *The Wizards of Odd*, though, comes close: a great nine.

Gideon Kibblewhite

Score 9/10

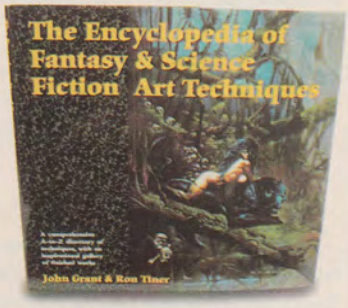
← minotaurism. Bad minotaurs have corrupted the original spirit – which essentially involves twatting every other race on Krynn. Bung in some dodgy priests, old enemies, a few dragons and some questy bits and bobs, and you've got the general formula to work with.

This should have a small logo with a piece of ancient hemp-rope and a dollar sign somewhere. You're better off sticking with your own imagination, which will far outshine anything you can find here. TSR must do much more to support their games than knock out this old, formulaic, badly crafted pap.

Tim Smith **Score 2/10**

The Encyclopedia of Fantasy and Science Fiction Art Techniques

by John Grant and Ron Tiner **Published by Titan**
Hardback £16.99 **Out now**



When I was starting out, books like this used to turn me off. I'd look at the square of sample technique – brushwork, hatching, scumbling etc, and then I'd wonder how these effects become the sensational images filling the book. After years of flops and failures, I found the key: obsessiveness; being obsessed with all visual qualities and ways of representing them. The *Encyclopedia* goes a good way towards encouraging this in the developing artist.

"As you draw, ideas will flow, because drawing and imagining have become two parts of the same activity."

First, it is led by concepts rather than technique; if you are gripped by an idea, techniques have to follow to make the idea come to life. Second, it has a realistic approach to the demands put on the artist/illustrator. There are 'brainstorming boxes' or trial projects challenging the reader to form ideas. And third, there's an invaluable section on how professionals have developed some of their concepts, with preliminary sketches, visual stories and character developments, together with commentaries on how they progressed.

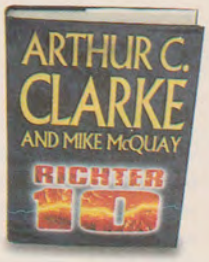
The *Encyclopedia* surveys a predictable field of imagery. The encouragement that this book gives is not to emulate the predictable but to find a personal angle. The authors stress drawing from life and then coming to an understanding of how drawing works for you personally. Out of this struggle comes an attitude and a style. This book is a place to start and develop, but it is worth remembering that all artists have to be born with talent. Even a good book can't give it.

David Atkinson

Score 8/10

Richter 10

by Arthur C Clarke and Mike McQuay **Published by Victor Gollancz**
Hardback £15.99 **Out now**



Arthur C Clarke, eh? This'll be worth reading then. Er, no. Unfortunately not. *Come again?* Well, for a start, the old man didn't actually write it himself. *Richter 10* began life as a movie outline. Arthur couldn't be bothered to finish it himself so he passed it on to his friend Mike McQuay. I don't think it was a particularly good idea in the first place, really – perhaps that's why Clarke lost interest – but McQuay certainly bodged it.

Really? He's an award winning writer too, isn't he? Yep. He got the Phillip K Dick award for *Memories*, but this is bilge. More a high-tech thriller than a science fiction novel, it's about a mad scientist who can predict and prevent earthquakes. No one believes him, of course, when the 'Big One' is about to strike.

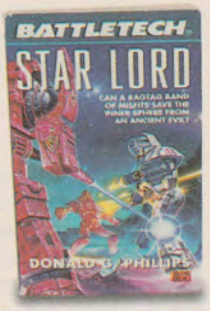
"'Nothing's wrong with me.' He pointed at the holos. 'That's what's wrong. This island is about to crack up... fracture into little pieces!'"

Ah. The words 'well trodden' and 'ground' spring to mind. Yes. The characters are very poor, too. It will still be a blockbuster, though, even if the earth didn't move for me.

Gideon Kibblewhite **Score 3/10**

Battletech: Star Lord

by Donald G Phillips **Published by ROC** **Paperback £3.50** **Out now**



First-time author Phillips' novel is set circa 3057 in the post-Truce of Tukayyid Inner Sphere and, despite an interesting central concept, *Star Lord* plays it pretty much by numbers; you have your group of disparate mechwarriors thrown together by forces beyond their control; you have your colossal threat to the galaxy; and you have your requisite number of Battletech punch-ups. No surprises here.

"Like no-one else alive today, I alone possess the true heritage. I alone am the rightful heir to the Star League. I am the Star Lord."

The story concerns a descendant of Stefan Amaris – the Hitler-like scumbag warlord who murdered the entire ruling Cameron bloodline, drove out the Kerenekys and helped drop the Star League into barbarism three hundred years ago – who has decided to regain his ancestor's place as Star Lord.

His first step is to destabalize the Inner Sphere's fragile peace by recruiting mechwarriors and disguising them as House Marik's Knights of the Inner Sphere. Cue the arrival of a misfit team of unlikely undercover agents, all seeking revenge, and the stage is set for mech-skirmishes aplenty.

Most of the characters are pretty thinly drawn types, doggedly motivated by their quest for some kind of vengeance on Amaris, and while the fight scene set pieces are okay, the story occasionally meanders or makes jarring narrative leaps. A fine core idea, though, that would probably make an even better *Mechwarrior* scenario.

Jim Swallow **Score 5/10**

Star Wars: The Essential Guide To Characters

by Andy Mangels Published by Boxtree Paperback £14.99 Out now

Star Wars: The Essential Guide To Characters is exactly what it says it is... excepting the 'Essential' bit.

It's an alphabetical listing of characters, each featuring a line drawing, 'vital statistics' such as height, preferred weapons and politics, and up to several pages of biography. Additional illustration is provided in the form of monochrome stills from the movies or frames from the comics.

The huge success of the *Star Wars* films has lead to numerous spin-offs. What makes *The Essential Guide To Characters* slightly more interesting than it first appears is the inclusion of characters and events from these spin-offs.

"What emerged from the fiery pool was a burnt husk of a man carrying in him hatred for Kenobi, and the power of the dark side."

So, although the biographies are somewhat disappointing – for the most part just detailing the actions of the character in the films and not really revealing anything new – they do summarise the plots of the various books and comic stories. It's this that might make *Star Wars: The Essential Guide To Characters* worthy of purchase. Fans of the films will find precious little new information about the characters' pasts or backgrounds, and referees of West End Games' *Star Wars* roleplaying game would be better off spending their money on one of the company's excellent background sourcebooks. For real completists only.

Andy Butcher Score 5/10

Blood Hostages

by J Robert King Published by TSR Paperback £4.99 Out now

This book may be formulaic fantasy but it's fun. Perverse enjoyment comes from the ceaseless parade of fantasy fiction conventions, while genuine pleasure comes from the headlong charge through the bizarre *Planescape* multiverse.

It shamelessly employs every fantasy cliché: a kidnap reveals an uncle's dark past; his teenage rescuers endure a process of self-discovery that reveals royal parentage; a mysterious mentor assembles a company of rogues to aid them; the kids have one of the most powerful magic items in the world; and a demon-god aims to use it to rule the universe.

"How strange, to have been awake only these few moments and already have my mind raped by a god."

Despite this, it's a tolerable read. The flat characters are rescued by the energy, variety and weirdness of the planes. No attempt is made to explain how each world works: the characters only see how that plane affects their skills, echoing the style of the *Planescape* manuals. Experienced *Planescape* players will warm to *Blood Hostages* as their game world is brought, somewhat functionally, to life. It's a useful source of planar descriptions, an example of how they can be played and an excellent introduction for those who wish to explore them. Just don't turn to it for plot inspiration.

Trenton Webb Score 5/10

aliens • conspiracies • deaths • hoaxes • crop circles • paranormal experiences • miracles • prophecies • shamans • fetishes • talking animals • psi • abductions • teleportation • vampires • weird sex • stigmata • manimals • freak • cannibalism • cults • bizarre behaviour • dinosaurs • disasters • epidemics • close encounters • poltergeists • UFOs • aliens • conspiracies • paranormal • prophecies • shamans • fetishes • talking animals • abductions • teleportation • manimals • freak • behaviour • dinosaurs • close encounters • conspiracies • paranormal • shamans • teleportation • manimals • behaviour • close encounters • conspiracies • paranormal • shamans • teleportation • manimals • freak • bizarre behaviour • dinosaurs • disasters • close encounters • poltergeists • UFOs • aliens • conspiracies • paranormal • shamans • teleportation • vampires • weird sex • stigmata • manimals • freak • cannibalism • cults • bizarre behaviour • dinosaurs • disasters • close encounters • poltergeists • UFOs • aliens • conspiracies • paranormal • shamans • fetishes • talking animals • abductions • teleportation • vampires • weird sex • stigmata • manimals • freak • cannibalism • cults • bizarre behaviour • dinosaurs • disasters • close encounters • poltergeists • UFOs • aliens • conspiracies • paranormal experiences • miracles • prophecies • cults • living dinosaurs • psi cops • x-files • hoaxes • teleportation • vampires • weird sex • stigmata • ft on-line: http://alpha.mic.dundee.ac.uk/ft/ft.cgi?-1,ft • poltergeists • UFOs • aliens • conspiracies • deaths

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arcane scribblings

We've had to re-design the letters pages this month to fit more in – you certainly are a mouthy lot. Keep 'em coming to the address below.

Dear arcane,

Stonkin' issue 4! The Stormburg Encounter is the best yet, and I agree (almost) wholeheartedly with Lee Made-up-name-Brimmicombe-Wood's article. Snobs who try and push roleplaying as an intellectual exercise in performance art – like that lot who run *Interactive Fiction* magazine – are a total pain in the dice pouch. I don't think that the story is always the most important thing in an RPG session, though; some of my fondest RPG memories start along the lines of 'sod the Crack of Doom; let's kill a lot of orcs!'

Mark Langford

Dear arcane,

Great mag, keep it up!

I've just read Lee Brimmicombe-Wood's article 'Heart of the Matter' in March's **arcane**, and I have to agree wholeheartedly with many of the points raised.

I have run, and will continue to run, plot-centric *AD&D* games. I enjoy setting out an involved and interesting story for the players to battle through.

Obviously, players need to be occasionally steered in the direction of your plot, and, similarly, sometimes you have to make adjustments to your plot to take into account different events.

By and large these changes are not too noticeable. As a referee you don't railroad your characters into a particular course of action, you coax them. In the same way, when they're presented with a number of choices, you don't expect players to go out of their way to find alternatives which will deliberately upset the plot.

It is important for both the ref and the players to realise and accept this so that both may enjoy the game.

Martin Grimes

Dear arcane,

The main premise of Lee Brimmicombe-Wood's article 'The Heart of the Matter' is that acting in a roleplaying game is selfish because it disturbs normal gameplay, annoys the other characters and detracts from the story, which is the truly important part of the roleplaying experience. I strongly disagree.

In his article, Lee (I use his first name because it's short – no disrespect is intended) makes the same mistake that the actor player makes, which is to assume that his view is the correct one.

It all begins with the idea that the story is an end in itself. This is an obvious viewpoint for a referee, but it's a very selfish one. Going through the story as planned is very satisfying to the referee, but means little to the players, especially if the characters have no interest in it and just feel compelled to play along because the referee wants them too.

To make a successful story, the referee should take into account the characters, or at least be prepared to handle them. In Lee's space adventure, it was indeed his fault for spending hours arguing, and he might have solved the problem by doing exactly what James did – acting in character. Was the crime boss making idle threats? James's character might have become more reasonable after having his sister kidnapped or his finger cut off. It could have created an interesting fight scene, anyway. And if this wasn't enough to convince the character, then killing him would have done the job.

This might seem drastic, but players who act their characters correctly should be willing to accept the consequences, as long as they are logical.

Don't assume that a player who doesn't want to go along with the story is the one ruining the fun for everyone. She may be ruining the fun for you, but it's entirely possible that players won't like your story, and just don't want to have to sit through it and suffer. You, the referee, might be in it for the story, but players and their characters may be in it for collecting magical items, for killing evil creatures, or for playing in character. If your story doesn't give them what they enjoy, then it's your own selfishness that prevents the game from being a success.

Lee does have one good point – when you have fun, you have to make sure you don't ruin the game for the others. But if this is true for the players, it's doubly true for the referee. It's not only the referee's job to create an adventure which will be fun for everyone – she must also be prepared to deal with any problems that arise. It's not an easy job, but someone's got to do it, and throwing ice picks at people who like a certain style of play doesn't solve the matter.

Eyal Teler

Well, Lee does seem to have touched a nerve here, doesn't he? He did write his article with the aim of starting a debate and it looks like he succeeded well...

Dear arcane,

Please help. I am currently reading *Shadow Moon* by George Lucas and Chris Claremont. I noticed it's the first part in the *Chronicles of the Shadow War*. Could you please tell me when the next part of *Shadow War* is coming out?

Desperate to know,

Clare Angela Hill

Erm, well... seeing as you asked so nicely, Shadow Dawn *will be published by Transworld on October 3rd. Hope that's not too long a wait for you.*

Dear arcane,

Why do you only paint small parts of some of the figures in the 'Hot Metal' feature? It only serves to detract from the effectiveness of the

communication

If you'd like to get in touch with **arcane** *there are several ways. The most traditional is to send us a letter clearly marked* **'arcane** *scribblings' and addressed to* **arcane**, 30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW. *The slightly more technically advanced can send us a* fax on (01225) 465982, *while all you fully fledged InfoCyberOtakuNauts out there can e-mail us at:*

arcane@futurenet.co.uk *or visit our web site on:*

http://www.futurenet.co.uk/entertainment/arcane.html.

We look forward to hearing from you.

My age still makes me eligible

Letter Of The MONTH

Dear arcane

I did not have a survey form in issue 1, but your age chart on page 23 of issue 4 will have to be altered somewhat. I am one of the older group, having been interested in fantasy for many, many years. My age is 67, and I am an ardent fan of *Dragonlance, Forgotten Realms* etc. I subscribe to *Dragon* and occasionally buy *White Dwarf* and *Dungeon* etc.

My main problem is also my age, because when I enter a fantasy shop to buy what I need the shopkeepers in general don't believe in me and ask why I haven't brought my grandchildren with me. They just don't think that my age still makes me eligible for all the joys and excitement that goes with roleplaying and reading.

Still, one must take the rough with the smooth. Long live the world of fantasy and all that goes with it.

Colin Lee

Well done, Colin: that should put paid to all the whingeing 'I'm 43 and still roleplaying; am I too old?' letters that we've been getting. You're never too old to have fun. You win an arcane *T-shirt which we hope you'll wear proudly.*

But of course, this raises another question. Is Colin the oldest roleplayer in the world? Or do you know better...?

pictures. Either paint the whole thing or don't bother!

A Mackenzie

We paint part of the figure so that you can see how well it would paint up while also having a fair idea of what it looks like unpainted. Does anyone else feel strongly about this? We're willing to change if you want us too. What should we do better?

Dear arcane,

Does anyone remember *Dragon's Lair* and *Space Ace*, the Laser-disc cartoon arcade games? I do. I completed them both. So that means that I've experienced them from beginning to end.

They were the most thrilling and exciting games I've ever played. While guiding the hero, with timing and quick reactions, my heart would pound through the whole game. There was never a game as good; the hero would even act exactly the same as how the player felt at every turn.

The artwork and animation was so good; it was better than on most PCs and next-generation consoles.

These games were brilliant, totally different from any normal game, but people can barely remember them; they were forgotten years ago.

There were a few games that were slightly similar, but nothing compared to the originals. *Dragon's Lair 2* was released but it was a flop and was nothing like the first. Anyone playing it without seeing the original *Dragon's Lair* and *Space Ace* will never know how good they were.

I believe that one day they will return and people will experience them as I did. Probably on the PC or next-generation consoles.

Please bring them back. I would love to play them again.

Elliot Harris

Elliot, you're mad. They were two of the lousiest 'railroading' games ever. How anybody who reads a roleplaying magazine can enjoy games that repeatedly give you 'a or b' choices rather than real freedom is beyond us.

Dear arcane,

I think the first half of Mr Pergon's letter last issue was a lot more relevant than the last. Yes, the card game boom is very similar to the *Fighting Fantasy* gamebooks, but I have to disagree when he suggests that the failure of a *Magic* RPG will prevent *Magic* players trying RPGs. Anything that gets more people interested in gaming, gets people into the shops and makes people start thinking of fantasy-based games as an enjoyable hobby has to be good.

Listen, Daniel, just because people enjoy card games doesn't mean they are going to play RPGs less: in fact the amount of time I spend playing has considerably increased. It's probably higher now than when I was a student.

I think the level of enthusiasm and interest generated by these cards can only be good for the industry as a whole.

Anne G Drop

Dear arcane,

In regards to the competition for Lieutenant Commander Data's head: the crew of the Enterprise-D visited the contemporary city of San Francisco in the year of 1893 (or thereabouts) in *Time's Arrow*.

Nicholas Kuyken

PS In light of the fact that we don't receive **arcane** in Australia until one and a half months after the people of England do, could you please make the closing dates of your competitions a bit later?

You'll be pleased to know that you made the closing date of the Data's Head competition by two days. We are aware that some of our readers live far away and we do try and have at least one competition every month that has a long entry time.

Dear arcane,

I hate to whinge in two successive letters, but does anyone find it as difficult to buy dice as I do?

Here I am, in the process of setting up a *Wraith* campaign – sorry, chronicle – and trying to pick up the umpteen 10-sided dice I will need. Fundamental things, easy to find, you might think. Not so, alas.

I trekked around all the game shops from here to Croydon (yes, I was that desperate) without success, except for a few paltry mixed ➔

arcane shorts

Bits that didn't make it into the main letters section.

I wonder if maybe you could have a small section where newcomers' questions could be answered? Questions like: 'In *AD&D*, can two or more characters club together to fight a monster?'

Lea Sharp

Well, try just writing to us. Er, yes they can, Lea.

When roleplaying games first came out, it wasn't long before people who knew nothing about them decided they were satanic and tried to ban them. But now, the National Lottery turns up and causes obvious cultural degeneration and greed, and nobody gives a monkey's. Funny old world, isn't it?

hayward1@campus.bt.com

Yes.

It seems there's always room for moaning when it comes to Games Workshop.

David J Wood

Yes, but not much.

Like I said, no-one can expect your writers to have read everything. But perhaps they ought to be reminded that they haven't?

Phil Masters

Consider them reminded.

None of the reviews in issue 4 was of the slightest interest to me. The preview of *Dragonlance* was, but why preview it? Why not just wait until it's available to you for a full review?

Phil Giles

We previewed Dragonlance *'cos we thought you'd find it interesting. You did. So what was your problem?*

letters

← tubes that were of precious little use. I found miniatures and paint aplenty, novels coming out of my ears (but you don't want to hear about my physical deformities) and a veritable mountain of CCGs. But no dice. None.

Although an independent games shop just off Charing Cross Road eventually sorted me out, isn't it a trifle stupid for all the others to be selling the games without the dice?

Dan Pergon

Yes, Dan. It is.

Dear arcane,

About two weeks ago I picked up **arcane** 3, mainly on the strength of the Molesworth RPG cos i am a compleet fan of mister surls literary (cheers cheers) wurks. I was impressed enough to head out and hunt down the first two, and was similarly impressed. I give you a 50/50 chance of getting to **arcane** 8 and beyond, which is more than I'd give any other new gaming magazine nowadays. (Wot, cynical? Me?)

However, regarding one of your comments in the *Freak Legion* review in **arcane** 2, namely '...Japanese manga films... demons... most of them.' Not true: only a small percentage are of the demonic and tentacle porn variety. These only get greater recognition because more people in Britain buy them than the mainstream cute/huge robot animé.

Still, you're right that *Freak Legion* allows you to mimic this genre. There's an interesting idea in the Manga Video release *Devilman* (more demons, less naughty tentacles): a human accepts demonic corruption to gain the power to fight other demons, keeping himself under control by his willpower and still-pure spirit. This concept makes much more use of Formori than playing the bad guys does, and can form the basis of an ongoing game.

Of late, with their *Year of the Hunter* releases, White Wolf seem to have realised that some of the best games you can play in the World of Darkness are as a mere mortal. Talk about the underdog. With *Project Twilight* you can really give Mulder and Scully something to worry about, and as for *The Inquisition*... well, have you ever read the *Warrior Nun* comics? Say no more...

Here's looking forward to **arcane** 4. Keep up the good work.

Andy 'Mad Baz' Tucker

A 50/50 chance of getting to ***arcane*** *8? We're going all the way to issue 50 and beyond, 'Mad Baz'. In fact, if you were smart you'd be booking your place at the table for our Golden Jubilee celebrations now.*

Dear arcane,

My younger brother has recently started to buy your so-called magazine. Initially I saw no real problem with this, until I noticed my brother and his friend spending hours sitting around a badly drawn map, rolling dice and discussing how much dexterity Dr Von Erhart has. I consider myself to be in touch with something that all of you roleplaying people have obviously yet to come to grips with... reality.

I have sat down and looked at your magazine and it looks rather like a consolation for the un-socialised nerds of this world. I read the article on page 25 of your February edition ('How to explain roleplaying games to your granny'). You seem to recognise that there is a problem in getting non-roleplaying types to understand what you are doing.

An obvious question comes to mind: why do people get involved with RPGs? I can only assume that your lives are so dull and boring that you have to pretend to be someone more exciting. As I conduct my life I often wonder about those people with no dress sense, no friends, no sex appeal and little intelligence. Thank you. Now I know what they all get up to at weekends: they all get together and spend hours playing roleplaying games.

On the positive side, I suppose you do give sad people the chance to be heroic, wonderful or even cool, even if it's only for a few hours. Maybe in future issues you could offer an anorak or some thick-framed NHS glasses as a competition prize; I'm sure it would inspire a massive response from your readers.

The real world

Hmm. And you expect us to rise to that? Honestly.

Dear arcane,

I have become a player of *Magic* fairly recently, but though I like the game and the cards I am not enough of a fan(atic) to try to collect a set or build a tournament-busting deck. The one sad thing is that I (and I'm sure loads of other people too) would really like to create and use my own cards but I can hardly see an opponent allowing a Blue Peter sticky-back plastic card in a game, and the chances are WotC are not going to publish my ideas...

I was thinking (given the date – 14/2/96) wouldn't it be a nice idea to give my wife a special Valentine's *Magic* card. This would be 'Hearts and Flowers', a two white mana instant that you give to your opponent (for them to keep in their hand/deck) and you gain two life. Then I thought about creating a whole Valentine's set which would be sold during January as boosters of one rare Valentine among seven other common *Magic* cards. There would be 'Cupid's Arrow' – an enchantment that prevents the target creature from doing anything; 'Blind Date' – one random untapped creature of your opponent is matched with a random untapped creature of yours, and both are removed from the game; 'Jealousy' (a black spell) – target creature must always attack... the list goes on!

Martin Norris

When we met Richard Garfield in Dublin for the interview that appeared in **arcane** *2 he told us that he'd used a* Magic *card to propose to his wife. He had a special card made up, called 'A proposal', and put it in his deck expecting to be able to produce it in the near future. Several weeks of play later it finally appeared in his hand. He played it and she accepted. Everybody say 'aaaah'.*

Dear arcane,

I wish to express my views on a subject that you have given a lot of coverage: 'Have CCGs killed roleplaying?' Personally I don't think that this is true. About a year ago I was introduced to *Magic: the Gathering* by a friend. Since then I have become more and more interested in other aspects of gaming, such as roleplaying.

And those people who feel strongly about the subject – why don't they just leave it alone? No one is going to force them to play card games, but in my opinion it's their loss if they don't. With all that time wasted thinking about 'those terrible card thingies' they could be contemplating the more important aspects of life. Such as 'when will Games Workshop realise that *Blood Bowl* was really good?'

Ross Gribbin

Yeah, it was really good wasn't it? But surely Games Workshop know that. Don't they?

Dear arcane,

I just finished your first issue (the mag takes some time to get to Australia), and I like the whole thing – yes, even the ads! EXCEPT FOR one little paragraph on page 9 – WHAT were you thinking when you wrote '... and the system sucks big time...'?

Spellfire – yes, that's what we're talking about. Now I admit the artwork is, well, CRAP – repeated images and mismatched characters abound – but the system is great. As a multi-player card game it walks all over *Magic: the Gathering*, which works best as a two-player game. With three or more players *Spellfire* is great fun; it's also simple so those who might not normally play complicated games like *Magic* can enjoy a game. Oh yeah, it's also significantly cheaper than *Magic*.

Lyndon Samson

Everyone's entitled to their opinion Lyndon. Even when they're as wrong as you are.

arcane On-Line special

The Internet. It's great isn't it? So many different people, so many different things to look at. Futurenet, the web site run by our sinister parent company, is one of the largest in Europe and contains, amongst many other things, the arcane forum. Here's a taste of what it's like...

Here's an excerpt from a long-running argument about the content of arcane...

Um... is it just me or is **arcane** lacking in content? I mean I'm not one to complain usually but it seems to me that what they have gained in quality, they lose in quantity. I think **arcane** needs to take a little dekko at *SFX* and maybe reformat it's intentions from there to make an altogether better magazine.

cjl324@ujvax.ulst.ac.uk

I agree entirely that **arcane** is lacking in content. For starters it should drop the generic scenario altogether. People want to see the rules and they want scenarios for specific backgrounds. What the generic scenario does is please no one. Put in system specific scenarios and it will at least please somebody. It boils down to the fact that **arcane** does not provide support for the gamer. It provides information about games, but not **for** games.

POOKMW@Falmouth.ac.uk

I'm responding to the view that **arcane** is lacking in content - at least content which is specific to certain games. The problem with that is that there're so many roleplaying systems out there that it would be impossible to give them all fair coverage. I think the way **arcane** is heading is probably the best way - a method which offers helpful ideas about designing gaming environments etc. In this way any sensible gamer can apply the material to whichever roleplaying system they play.
I think it's great that we've finally got what looks to be a really good roleplaying magazine.

bsdi@hillside.co.uk

Of course, **arcane** would have more contents if it didn't completely ignore live roleplaying...

marcus@ma.man.ac.uk

Which leads us neatly on to some extracts from the lively live roleplaying debate...

LRPers are a valid part of roleplaying in general but you can't go into your local newsagent and find a magazine that will show where groups are or find info about up and coming LRP conventions. I would like to know peoples' thoughts on LRP be they of scorn, praise or embarrasment! Get your cozzies on and be FREE!!!

turnerp@ecid.cig.mot.com

Yep LRP - great stuff. And you're right - unless you know of a group you are generally stuffed. You'll find most universities run LRP events, but apparently some won't take outsiders. Other people to try are, of course, Labyrinthe. Some friends of mine are working on starting one up this summer so I'll keep you informed as to their progress.

S.lowe@stud.umist.ac.uk

There's also a keen debate on which system novices should start gaming with.

It depends very much on what you know about the beginners. For relatively mature types with a possible aversion to number-crunching, I might well suggest *Everway*, whereas a bunch of slightly nerdy computer programmers might even enjoy starting with *Champions* (though that'd be a risk). If the GM was reasonably bright, *GURPS* in some flavour would be safe.

phil@philm.demon.co.uk

Personally, the first game I ever played was *Warhammer FRP* (no, I wasn't an avid wargamer) and I found it fairly simple to pick up the rules and then experiment. No-one ever said you had to go by the rules - In fact all you Cyberpunks out there will probably come back with rule no.4:
BREAK ALL THE RULES!

ug1034@sees.bangor.ac.uk

I'm surprised no-one's mentioned the *Storyteller* system yet. Although it's not my absolute favourite, I like it a lot and I think the basic system is easy for novices to grasp.

u9426825@qub.ac.uk

As a relative newcomer myself, (about 5 months) I haven't played many systems. But years ago I started on *Shadowrun* and it didn't cut the mustard as far as I'm concerned, maybe now I've had experience it would be better...

la395@gre.ac.uk

As you can see there's lots of lively debate going on. And this really is just a tiny part of the forum - there are currently 39 different topics being discussed with over 200 individual postings in all. And that's when this mag goes to press. By the time you read this there'll be even more. So why not come and have a go?

The rest of the site

The arcane Forum
Share your views on roleplaying - its past, present, future and anything else you feel like talking about - with us and other gamers.

Contacts
Having trouble finding gamers in your area? Our Contacts page is designed to help you get in touch, wherever you live.

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If you're a writer or an artist and you're interested in working for **arcane** as a freelancer, we want to hear from you.

arcane links
Take a look at some of the best sites from all around the world and some of the worst from Norwich.

arcane is on sale now in your local newsagent or game store for only £3. If you have any trouble finding it, please e-mail us at arcane@futurenet.co.uk.

Part of the tidily designed arcane web site.

Pointing your browser

Our forum page is just part of the arcane web pages. They can be found at: http://www.futurenet.co.uk/entertainment/arcane.html.
In addition to the forum there are also links to many other sites of special roleplaying interest, there are reader ads, contacts to be made around the world, articles reprinted from earlier issues of the magazine and, ooh, a couple of other things as well. Come and take a look.

free reader ads

Got a rare Magic card you want to sell or trade? Having trouble finding fellow gamers in your area? Got a club, organisation or fanzine you want to promote? Fill in the form, send it to us and we'll print it next month.

games for sale

● 1984 *Rahasaia*, 1986 *Saga Shadowlands*, 1983 *D&D Basic* rules (no dice). Trade for *Spellfire* or sell. *AD&D* CD boxed set. As new. 01797 367748.

● *Dragon Dice Dragonlord* for sale. Still sealed on card. Write with sensible offers to Richard, 9 Cressey Court, Fort Pitt Hill, Chatham ME4 6TW.

● *Man O' War* including supplements *Sea of Blood, Plague Fleet* and two fleets: *Dwarf & Dark Elf*. £80. All complete & unused. Rob 0171 3772533.

● *Mega Traveller, Golden Heroes, Blackbeard, Stormbringer 4th Edition, Dark Emperor, Firefight, Chrome Berets, Toon*. £10 each. Steve 0181 5212064.

● *Null-Grav Football*, the pbm game of sports management (similar to American Football). Jon on 01246 853138.

● RPG clearout. Books, modules, magazines and fanzines. Send large ssae for lists. Mark Gilby 47 Reservoir Road, Surfleet, Lincs PE11 4DH.

● RPGs, magazines, boardgames, etc for sale. Sae for lists. Jon Simcoe, 34 Charles St, Kettering, Northants NN16 9RN.

● *Stormbringer* boxed 1st ed. *Vampire, Werewolf* and supplements. *Dragon Pass* boardgame. Other RPGs, boardgames. Adrian 0114 2668364 evenings.

● Tolkien Fans! SPI *Middle-earth* c 1977. Three games, complete except *War Of The Rings* rules pamphlet. Offers please. Rod Cornaby, 35 Beechcroft Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP1 6BB, 01473 743619.

● Unwanted competition prizes: *Pendragon 4th Edition, GURPS Basic 3rd Edition, GURPS Magic 2nd Edition*. Offers. Dave 0121 628 6142.

cards for sale

● 600 basketball cards for £175. Nick and Michael, 12 Castle Street, Biloela 4715, Queensland, Australia. 079 922111/923135.

● 900+ *Spellfire* cards for sale. 1st edition *Ravenloft, Dragonlance*. 100+ rares. £30 ono. Call James 01670 518706 after 5pm weekdays.

● *Jyhad* cards for sale or swap. Contact Samantha 01202 428082.

● *Legend of the Five Rings*. Trade? Tel 01225 332385 evenings.

● *M:TG* collection. 4,000+ cards, including *Time Walk, Beserk* and other oops and rares. Will accept £500 ono. 0161 4459605.

● *M:TG* collection. 4,300+ cards inc 100s rares, oops. Scrye value £2,500+. £500 ono. John 0181 4586581.

● *M:TG Ice Age* set, *Revised* set, *4th Edition* set – £200 each. Ring Chris on 01472 601004 after 6pm.

● *M:TG Leviathan, Chaos Moon, War Chariot, Serpent Generator* and more. Sell or trade for *Spellfire*. Tel 01797 367748

● *Magic, ST:TNG, Rage, Shadowfist, Spellfire, Illuminati* + others. Send SAE for lists. Jon Simcoe, 34 Charles St, Kettering, Northants NN16 9RN.

● *Middle-earth* and *Star Trek: TNG* cards for sale or trade. Russ 01843 290043

● Trading *Magic* and *Middle-earth* cards for *Middle-earth* (unlimited). Ring for details 01383 860958. Coates.

wanted

● About 10 years ago, Games Workhop cast American archive miniatures for Games Day. Good prices paid. David Wood 0161 2559821.

● Anybody got *Populous 1&2, Utopia Powermonger* or *Mega-lo-Mania* for the SNES? Phone Sean 01795 665978.

● *Car Wars*, the old plastic box fella, with any related stuff, especially the *Cars Wars/Champions* supplements. 01226 243642 Ian.

● *Dragonlance Classics* vol 1 in usable state with complete maps and character cards. Will pay reasonable price, depending on condition. Alex Gay, 40 Rayleigh Road, Pennfields, Wolverhampton WV3 0AP, tel 01902 713151.

● *Gamesmaster Pack* and *For Your Information* supplements to *James Bond 007* by Victory games. Desperately desired. Please help me. Maggie, 498 Whitton Ave West, Greenford UB6 0EG, tel 0181 422 4771.

● Has anyone out there got any unpainted White Wolf miniatures for sale? If so, contact Iain on 01651 872416.

● I'm looking for *Harlequin* and *DNA/DOA* for *Shadowrun*. If anybody can help, phone Douglas Thompson on 01382 552742.

● Looking for old TSR module *B/X1 Night's Dark Terror*. Can swap unique material. H C Freie, St Olefsln 26, 2613 EJ, Delft, Holland.

● Magazines wanted: *Pegasus, Beholder, Adventurer, Dungeoneer, GC*. Laurent Picard, 63 rue Leberthon, Appt 121, 33000 Bordeaux, France.

● *Magic* cards bought, sold, traded etc. Phone Steve on 01245 784515 after 6pm. Will travel to play and trade!

● Previous edition (preferred hardcover) Warhammer FB and Warhammer Armies rulebooks. Contact Rod 01603 486327 evenings or Sunday

● *Rage (Wyrm)* wanted: *Malfeas, Enticer, War Knife*. Buy or trade for most *Rage, Vampire, Magic, Shadowfist*. James 01705 378442.

● *Rage Wyrm* cards: past lives, chase, rares. *Overpower*: rares. To buy or swap. Phone Kev or leave message on 0114 2680003.

● Ral Partha 01-116 Belladona Knight on Plague Fly. Also early US miniatures and catalogues eg Superior, Broadsword etc 0161 2559821.

● Veteran gamer seeks old *AD&D* modules *G1, G2, G3, D1, Q1*. Howard Kingston, flat 4, Fulflood Ct, Greenhill Rd, Winchester, Hants SO22 5EG.

clubs

● Alternative Realities, Eastbourne's premier games club. Monday nights 7-10pm. Contact Jarec: tel 01323 500624 email jarec@cix.compulink.co.uk.

● Birmingham Central Roleplayers. Thursdays 7.30. Ladywood Community Centre. Bar. Over 16s. About £1 a night. Steve Jones 0121 5857263.

● Black Country RPS. Thu 7.30. Albright & Wilson Rec, Station Rd, Oldbury, W Mids. All ages and games. 70p a night. Steve Turner 01384 235244.

● Central London branch of The Guild of Melee and Magic meets every Monday and Tuesday. Phone Jason on 0181 7158675.

● East London branch of The Guild of Melee and Magic meets every Thursday. Phone Douglas on 0181 5535332.

● *Elemental Lords* LRP based in Worcester; a fantasy game of magic, mayhem and monsters. Contact Paul 01905 425672.

● Exeter University Games Society meets Sundays from 2pm in the Cornwall House Refectory, Exeter University Campus.

● *Fantasy/Vampire* LRP, Derby/Nottingham. Contact Martin Lee 08501 89892.

● Fomoria LRP Club. Adventure in darkest Dorset. Inexperienced LRPers welcome. Unique, fully playtested system. Contact Darren 01725 517322.

● Glasgow University Gaming Society meets Thurs 5pm, Queen Margaret Union, University Gardens. Term time only. Non-students welcome.

● *IOW, Masquerade, Vampire* LARP meetings every other Sunday, Newport Youth Centre, 7.15pm. Details 01983 528758 Nigel. New members wanted

● Inverness roleplaying and wargaming association, meets Railway Club (upstairs) Mondays, 6-10pm. Fee: £1.20. First night free.

● Leatherhead Games Club. Small group meet Mondays in Leatherhead. Currently running *Earthdawn* campaign. Interested? Jef on 01372 375202.

● *Magic: The Gathering, Star Wars & Star Trek*. Join our playing group in Bristol. Call 0117 9721701.

● Renegade roleplaying club starting again soon in Ilford, Essex area. Over 16s. If interested contact Mark on 0181 4915382.

● Roleplayers of Chester. Weds, 7.30-late. Chester Rail Club, Lightfoot St, Chester. Contact Ged 01244 314435 or Greg 01606 883698.

● Roleplayers wanted. No trained killers. Meet in Irvine, Ayrshire. Play most RPGs, *Vampire* etc. Phone David on 01294 275267

● Roleplaying & games club, Thursdays 6.30pm-10.00pm. The Parkhouse Centre, Bude, Cornwall. For more details ring 01288 355612.

● RPGA Network roleplaying club. New members welcome. Sunday afternoons 1.45pm, 2nd Arnold Scout HQ, Calverton Rd, Arnold, Nottingham.

● Shadow Warriors West London branch of The Guild of Melee and Magic meets every Saturday. Phone Gerald on 0181 7239008.

● South London branch of the Guild of Melee and Magic meets every Sunday. Phone Jon on 0181 6999654

● *Sword & Sorcery* LRP in Manchester area. Contact 'Nemesis' on 0161 7476905 or write: 2 Whitegates Rd, Cheadle SK8 1EA.

● The Dark Door Club runs *Cthulhu*-esque LRP adventures. For information contact P Hardy, 32 Park Hall Road, London SE21 8DW.

contacts

● 18 year old seeks others to game with (gm or player) in Oxford area. Call Liam 01608-810827.

● *AD&D* player looking to join (or start) club in Worcester Park, Stoneleigh area. Ring Jeffrey on 0181 3373138.

● *AD&D, GURPS, WFRP, Runequest* and *Judge Dredd* player seeks club in Pitlochry area. Also played *Traveller*. David 01796 472211.

● Beginner player, 26, seeks maturer group for adventure. Willing to play anything. Herts/N London area. Call Julian 01727 838975.

● Contacts required to form circle. Into sci-fi, horror, gaming, fantasy art. London area. Call Nick on 0181 6772293.

● Contacts wanted in n/e London area. RPGs or wargames. Call Steve 0181 5212064.

● Crowthorne novice seeks gamers. Any level. View to forming club. Write: Myf, Cypress House, Pinewood Ave. Crowthorne, Berks. RG45 6RS.

● Cumbria. Male (31) seeks group in

reader ads

Keswick/Penrith/Workington area. Open to all RPGs; would like to try some new ones. Mark: 017687 75184.

● *Cyberpunk* players and GM wanted, aged 13 to 16, in East Kilbride area. Contact Andrew at 01355 245120.

● *Epic Space Marine* player seeks players in London area 0171 6145705 Ken.

● *Epic Warhammer 40,000* player seeks other adult players in Chippenham area. Please call on 01249 462073.

● Established veteran RPG group seeks fresh input. Glasgow area. Own transport useful, not essential. Contact David 0141 6384170.

● Experienced GM/player (22) seeks other roleplayers, novice or veteran, in Dumfries area. Contact Rich 01387 250875.

● Experienced GM seeks three or four players (18+) for *AD&D* campaign. North London. Ring Simon on 0181 3723449.

● Games Workshop and TSR player seeks fellow gamers in Craven/Airedale area soon. Ages 12–16. Contact Ashley 01535 633472.

● *Harnmaster* players in London please contact Edward on 0171 3597318 (evenings). Have campaign will travel.

● Help! Student (20) novice roleplayer seeks RPG group in Middlesborough area. I've general RPG knowledge but little experience. Douglas Watson, 52 Kingston St, Middlesborough TS1 4HD.

● Help. GM requires inspiration for *Rifts, Cyberpunk, Cybergeneration, WFRP.* Contact Mark 0122 4581388 or BE1MAM@eee.rgu.ac.uk.

● I am a novice *Magic* player looking for a club in the Halesowen or Birmingham area of Midlands. Neil Hickman 01384-836343.

● In limbo *AD&D* veteran (player/DM) keen to roleplay again. Try anything! Bristol area. Call Tim on 01275 830080.

● Inexperienced player seeks gaming group in London. Any fantasy, horror, science fiction or cyberpunk. Contact Andy 0171 7031167.

● *M:TG*, LRP, *Necromunda, WFRP* players wanted Sutton/Surrey area. Must have sense of humour and like beer. 18+ only. 0181 7155658.

● *Magic: The Gathering* players and card swaps, near the Islington, London area. S Hong 0171-2789596. All welcome.

● Mature roleplayer seeks group of gamers into Warhammer *FRP, AD&D, CoC, Stormbringer* etc. Dave 0121 628 6142.

● *Nephelim* GM seeks players (French scenarios in English). Only over 17s. Central London location. Contact Jonathan 0171 3510470.

● Newcastle/Durham area. V experienced GM/player seeks group. Owns *AD&D, Storyteller, Cthulhu, BattleTech* plus. Alan 0191 3887122.

● Newcomer seeks letters from anyone into roleplaying. Gael Bladen–Hovell, 13 Hillside Ave, Silverstone, Towcester NN12 8LR.

● Noble and Elf Ranger seek other *Warhammer Quest* roleplayers in the Huddersfield area 13+. Contact Sir Albert Uttergeit 01484-511170.

● Novice gamer into PBM and *Magic* seeks penpals for tuition and brainstorm. Gael. 13 Hillside Ave, Silverstone, Northants. 01327 857488

● Novice roleplayers aged about 13 in Edinburgh/Midlothian area write to David Storey, 14 Inkerman Court, Penicuik, Scotland EH26 0LS.

● Novice RPG player needs group of adults to game with. Any system. Chester–le–Street, County Durham 0191 3885691 Alan.

● Novice seeks RPG group aged 17–20. Mix of genres and systems preferred. Chesterfield area. Contact Richard 01246 233435.

● Opponents needed for any game systems, especially tabletop wargames. Years of experience with GW games. Contact Chris 0181 3109360.

● Players in Edenbridge and surrounding area wanted. All systems GM'd or played. Near Tunbridge Wells. Douglas Jessup, 17 Park Avenue, Edenbridge TN8 5LA, tel 01732 864 346.

● Players wanted for fantasy and sci-fi postal RPGs. Please write to Stewart Leary, 9 Oundle Road, Alwalton, Peterborough PE7 3UP.

● Players/storytellers wanted for *Werewolf: the Apocalypse.* Also maybe other RPGs. Strood area. Neal 01634 719194.

● Playtesters required for new LRP game called *Conflict!.* It's Fantasy based. Interested? Call Mark on 0181 4915382.

● *Rage, Magic, Blood Bowl!* 13-year-old player needs somebody to play with. Nicholas Gunn, Laverstock, Salisbury 01722 337382.

● Roleplayers wanted. Doncaster area. Age 17+. *Vampire, Stormbringer, Darkside.* Jo Smith, 89 Hexthorpe, Doncaster, S Yorkshire DN4 0BE.

● Small roleplaying group seeks new players in Felixstowe area. 16+. Wide variety of games played. Call Paul 01394-276975.

● Wanted: players (18+) for weekly game in Southend on Sea area. Mark on 0171 3682213 daytime.

● *Warhammer 40k* player in Cambridge area seeks other players over 16. Call Tom 01638 780745 after 5pm.

● *Warhammer 40k* player seeks fellow gamers in West Yorkshire area (14+) Phone Chris 01943 602852.

● *Warhammer 40k/AD&D* player seeks to start a game club in Smethwick. Phone Mark 0121 5558290.

● *Warhammer 40k/Quest* player seeks players 16–19. Bridgwater area. Please contact Paul, 45 Friarn Ave, Bridgwater, Somerset TA6 3RF.

● White Wolf/Palladium etc players/GMs wanted (14+). Leeds area. Contact: Sean, 5 Raynville Grange, Bramley, Leeds, W Yorks LS13 2QD.

fanzines

● *Chaos Trail* interactive fiction. Epic, gothic, atmospheric. Superb narratives. Purity of vision. Flat 3,153 Lincoln Rd, Peterborough PE1 2PW.

● *Entity*, the skiffy fanzine. Fiction, PBM. Send 40p and ssae to Entity, Old Barn, Hundley Way, Charlbury OX7 3QE.

● New fanzine: *RAGE!.* It covers RPGs, PBMs, CCGs, sci–fi & lots of other stuff. Win *X-files Guide* (RRP £9.99) when you subscribe. £7 per year (six issues). Telephone Peter on 01291 421105 on weekdays after 3pm.

● *Role Call* – A4 fanzine for console RPGs (*FFIII* etc.). Four issues available £1.20 or £7 sub (6 issues). Rachel Ryan 01925 490910.

● *Warpstone*, the *Warhammer* FRP fanzine. £1 from John Foody, 10 Colenso Road, Clapton London E5.

other stuff

● 24hr charity gaming marathon, 29/30th March, Eastbourne. Contact Jarec: tel 01323 500624 email jarec@cix.compulink.co.uk.

● Clan Amber, a residential *Amber* RPG convention in Edinburgh. 8–10 Nov. Contact Nicky Cannon 70/5 Craighouse Gardens, Edinburgh EH10 5UN.

● Dudley Bug Ball (27.4.96) presented by the Black Country RPS, a Midlands RPG convention in aid of charity. £1. Details: Steve Turner 01384 235244.

● Fantasy maps for sale. Vast worlds. For details send sae to Mike, 10 Wordsworth Vale, Acklam, Middlesborough, Cleveland TS5 8PL.

● Games Workshop Squig picture by Mark Gibbons for sale. Framed, signed print. Two in existence. Offers to Colin on 01733 574498.

● Market research needed for combat play by mail. Interested? Contact D Rivett, 3 Mead Crescent, Forest Hall, Newcastle/Tyne NE12 9RP.

● Roleplayers of Chester *M:TG* tournament (Type I & II). Sat, 30–3–96, 10am. Chester Rail Club. Admission £2. Contact Ged 01244 314435.

● Write to Trevannion House, Cardrew Lane, Redruth, Cornwall for free RPG by mail! Leave Address. Ten players needed.

Please place my free ad under the following heading

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April 1996

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IT WAS A TIME OF DARKNESS

by TB Falsename Episode Q

PREVIOUSLY ON "IT WAS A TIME OF DARKNESS":

Escaping death at the hands of the villainous Captain Raxinfraxin, Princess Breasts flees with Ash and Inspector Petit-Pivic, unaware they are being spied on by the wily magician Dixdastardlax.

Meanwhile, in a galaxy far, far away, a space princess and a courageous farm lad discover too late that they are related, and their cretinous inbred offspring prove a poor match for the evil Lord Yorkshireman-in-a-Cape.

Now read on.

(Scene: The spiral staircase of Raxinfraxin's prison tower. He descends leisurely, accompanied by another henchman, Endo M'b. Soldiers follow.)

ENDO *(a lounge-lizard)*: You have to practise, Rax, m'dear. The people aren't going to stand for a failed dandler as Lord Protector. What the devil?

(They have reached the bottom, emerging into the carnage left by the smashing fight from last episode. Endo barks orders, and soldiers rush about. Raxinfraxin sternly awaits a report.)

ENDO: There's no sign of the princess, of course. The horses have been driven off. We found Rochangrafel run through. Somebody finally beat him to the draw.

RAXINFRAXIN: How vexing.

ENDO: The men ask permission to bury the body.

RAXINFRAXIN *(absently)*: Here in the swamp?

ENDO: It's a common religious belief among the soldiers. They have to bury him where he fell, painting his skull with 'head lines' to ward off demons. Apparently the reeds circling the tower can be used as brushes.

RAXINFRAXIN: You see, Endo, this is what I mean. Akansaxchukabuk is in the stone age. I want to bring it into the present – a fast-paced, modern city with street vendors on every corner selling exciting merchandise to an efficient, ambitious populace. *(Sighs.)* Let them bury Rochangrafel, and have Corporal Max run up to the belltower and signal for a a coach. And bring me the schedules and worksheets; I'll go over them while we wait.

ENDO: Right, Rax. *(Shouts.)* Headlines! Reeds all about it! Max back up stack to blag Rax tax! *(Hands over itinerary.)* Your paper governor.

(Cut to Dixdastardlax's inner sanctum. His servant faces the cadaverous gaunt stranger.)

PEN-Y-BHYSTAB: What do you want, gaunt stranger?

GAUNT-STRANGER *(fiercely)*: That's Gaunt-Stranger, gimpy midget. *(Smoothly.)* My partners and I are puzzled, Dixdastardlax. We were under the impression we had a deal. If memory serves, in return for our magical powers, you'd persuade Mortleigh to go on that crusade, suggest to Saxinraxin and the Captain you could rule as a triumvurate, then double-cross Raxinfraxin, elevate doubles of his sons to the throne, declare a holiday, blow up the palace, use the sacred tools of Peyton Pendant to spin the soul of the Princess into the fabric of the new building, declare war on the entire region and have the Princess-creature seize control of the other kings when they attended the truce talks.

DIXDASTARDLAX: Yes, well, things have become a little complicated since then. That cursed Inspector's bargained for the aid of the wood god Ash.

GAUNT-STRANGER *(curtly)*: He is merely a hire power. We want results, Dixdastardlax, extremely soon. *(He vanishes in a blinding flash, during which we cut to to a boat sculling downriver under cover of darkness.)*

PRINCESS: Now, Petit-Pivic – tell me of the dangers facing Akansaxchukabuk.

PETIT-PIVIC: Looking directly past the spires of the palace into the sun, I suppose. Oh, right. Well –

ASH *(cutting in)*: Silence. I sense a presence on the bank. *(His voice booms.)* This boat is under my personal protection. Any threat of violence will be most severely dealt with. I repeat, most severely.

VOICE *(off)*: Oh, there they are. Fire.

ASH: No, wait, it was a ventriloquial jape.

(Arrows splatter into the boat.)

(Is the Princess's company doomed? Will Raxinfraxin discover Dixdastardlax's treachery? What is the new threat to Akansaxchukabuk?)

TO BE CONTINUED...

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